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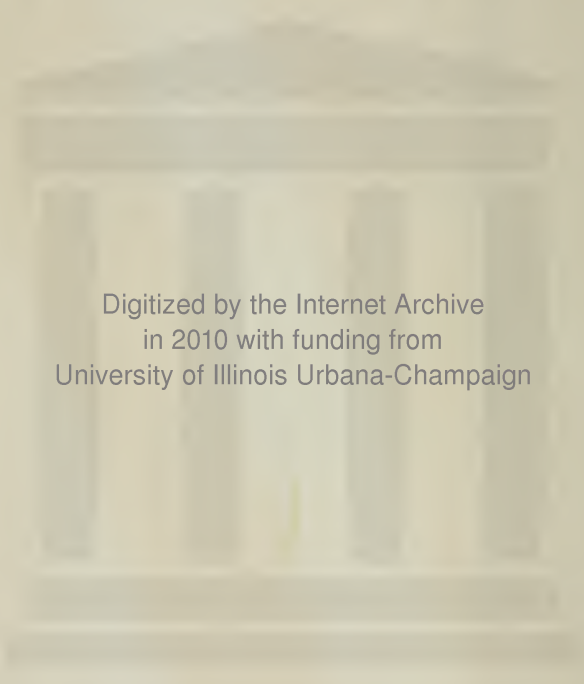
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CÆSAR BORGIA;

AN

HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "WHITEFRIARS."

Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle
Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime ?
Where the rage of the vulture, the love of the turtle,
Now melt into sorrow, now madden to crime ?

BYRON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON :
HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,
GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1846.

LONDON:
GEORGE WOODFALL AND SON,
ANGEL COURT, SKINNER STREET.

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PREFACE DEDICATORY.

FORASMUCH as in the course of this my present labour, which I have undertaken for the benefit of these times, or, if they should prove ungrateful, of posterity; considering the extraordinary and dangerous nature of the materials with which I wrought, (even as one who extracteth fine colours and dyes out of poisonous roots and minerals, or composeth brilliant devices in fire with explosive compounds,) I have felt myself more than ever exposed to the attacks of the NATURAL ENEMIES of all writers whom the world hath honoured with its commendations: and also remembering that certain Cliques have vowed my utter destruction in revenge for having demonstrated that the chief part of salvation is out of their little pales, the panic fear whereof all the generosity and favour of the Public, speaking through its mightiest organs,

have not altogether dissipated!—considering these considerations, I say, the necessity of obtaining some protection for my work and myself did occur to me in a very ghastly manner, even as to a country lass who has parted with her sweetheart, and who perceiveth at a distance an awful TURNIP LANTERN, set by a jealous rival on a hedge, with sharp teeth, flaming eyes, and fearfully pale visage!

And even as she casteth about and debateth in her own mind, hesitating, on a stile, what to do, so did I: and thereupon the practice of the authors our predecessors of the two late centuries, came in my cogitations; who, visited by similar apprehensions, by soliciting the countenance and aid of some powerful friend, in a DEDICATION, unconsciously imitated the unlearned conclusion of the apple-cheeked wench when she turneth back a whole corn-field, and requesteth her lover to accompany her past the object, albeit acknowledging the unreal nature of the terrors diffused by the hollow esculent.

Moreover, it seemed to me that in labouring, by example, to restore the Art of Dedication to the esteem it once enjoyed, I should confer a great and substantial benefit on literature. An art, indeed, nearly lost, like that of illuminating upon

glass, which it much resembles, the object of both being to substitute a gorgeous glare for the pure insipidity of truth or daylight; but whose advantages, at least to the artist, cannot be denied, and are therefore not to be despised by any modern professor of literature. For although the world hath abandoned some of its favourite traditions relating to the proper treatment of authors, and hath not of late publicly starved any one of the tribe,—yet until the nations do universally arrive at the conclusion that MIND is property as well as MUD; that justice (to say nothing of gratitude) demands that those who supply the highest and noblest wants of humanity should be no worse treated than those who minister to its basest and most animal requirements; that no point of national policy or well-being is concerned in confiscating the property of a foreign author for the benefit of a native bookseller; and that it is a procedure as unjust, though not so palpable, as to seize a cargo of foreign corn for the use of the native baker, *gratis*, under pretext that it was not grown by the country into which, for that very reason, it is imported!—until, in brief, an Universal Copyright is conceded to all authors, by all civilized nations, railroad kings will continue to be the richest of men!—and until then the “smallest contribution” should be thankfully

received by literature; and as a dedication has always been considered a claim on the patron's generosity, to restore the custom is to confer a great literary benefit!

But so great is my alarm—which increaseth with every bold word I enforce myself to utter—that I dare not confide in the protection of one patron only; and therefore I have selected several, to whom I dedicate the following work under a form of division, which also, in a *modest* and *unpretending* manner, expresseth the contents.

To Ladies and Gentlewomen, and indeed to all honest and fair damsels who amuse their leisure hours with profitable perusals, is dedicated all that relates to Beauty's triumphs, disdains, favours, and excellent caprices; to Lovers, the sweet and amorous parts are feelingly inscribed; to Soldiers, the martial achievements; to Scholars, the learning; to Historians, the romance; to Romancers, the history; to Poets, the verse; to Moralists, the catastrophe; to Critics, all that they find good; and to Posterity, the whole!

In recompense for the distinguished honour which I have thus conferred, all that I demand of the

munificence of my patrons (with understanding that it is not to become a precedent) is—that they will believe me when upon my word and honour I assure them that I am myself and nobody else!—that all the conjectures and imputations which have confounded me with divers renowned personages do them the GREATEST INJUSTICE!—that I have never had my portrait put to any book, although I, too, might have taken warning by the doubtfulness of Shakspeare's, and used the precaution so diligently observed by the immortal writers of this age, who have themselves carefully seen to the transmission of their features, tastefully idealized on canvas, to posterity!—and that whatever the liberality of foreign and domestic critics may have fathered upon me, I solemnly assure the whole human race that the only compositions of the kind with which I have contributed to its delectation are three in number; whereof the first is entitled “Whitefriars,” the second “Whitehall,” and the third what the puissant reader may readily discover by turning over this leaf, on which I subscribe myself,

His or her most obliged and terror-stricken

Servant and Client,

THE AUTHOR OF “WHITEFRIARS.”

CÆSAR BORGIA.

CHAPTER I.

ITALY IN THE YEAR 1500.

“Che le terre d’Italia tutte piene
Son di tiranni; ed un Marcel diventa
Ogni villan che parteggiando viene.”—DANTE.

For all the lands of Italy o’erflow
With tyrants; and each barbarous slave becomes,
Nursing our mad divisions, sovereign.

THE great festival of the Christian world, the Jubilee of the year of Our Lord 1500, notwithstanding the distracted state of Italy, and the evil repute of the sovereign head of the church himself, attracted vast multitudes of pilgrims from all parts of Europe to Rome. Although firmly persuaded of the truth of the dark legends afloat concerning the cruelty, tyranny, and licentiousness of the supreme pontiff, Alexander VI., these pious wanderers were not deterred from seeking at his hands the indulgences and plenary absolutions offered to the faithful attending the jubilee in the city of St. Peter. The great dogma of the church that, however it may happen in matters

temporal, in matters spiritual it is never deserted by its founder, had as yet sustained no shock in the universal opinion. It seemed as if the world, like Boccaccio's Jew, was only the more convinced of the divine essence of a religion which could remain so unshaken by the viciousness of its professors. The fire kindled by Savonarola seemed to die out with that which consumed his own substance; or threw forth only a few bickering and scattered sparkles which were far from portending the great conflagration at hand. Remorse for guilt, the pangs of sorrow, the restlessness of suffering, the fears of superstition, the dreams of enthusiastic devotion, conducted thousands from all the regions of then Catholic Europe to the capital of Christianity. It is computed that no less than two hundred thousand pilgrims entered Rome on this grand festival—the last which the church celebrated in her unity.

The dignity of danger, perhaps, gave zest to the devotion of the warlike populations which sent each their quota to the spiritual rendezvous. At no period of her stormy existence had Italy been so convulsed and devastated by almost all the evils which can befall a nation,—by foreign invasion and domestic strife,—as at the period when we take up our chronicle.

In the South, the French, Spaniards, Turks, and Neapolitans, struggled for the possession of Naples and Sicily, and deluged the beautiful lands in dispute with their blood. In the North, the French and Venetians ravaged Lombardy. Milan, in a series of revolutions, alternately lost and regained independ-

ence; numerous small states, among which were distinguished the polished dukedom of Ferrara, and the republics of Pisa, Lucca, and Sienna, with difficulty withstood subjugation to one or other of the mighty oppressors, their neighbours. In Tuscany, the Florentines, rent by furious factions, though protected by the French, were scarcely able to baffle the ambitious designs of the papal power, directed against them with the sagacity, perfidy, and merciless energy which distinguished the captain-general of the church, Cæsar Borgia, above all the politicians and commanders of the age.

This too famous leader was the natural son of Alexander VI., whom, to the scandal of the whole Christian world, he had raised to the highest honours which it was in his supremacy to bestow—honours which were far from satisfying the ambition of the recipient, to whom the princes of Italy ascribed the vast project of uniting its shattered sovereignties into an imperial crown for his own head. The great abilities which he had displayed in war, his unmatched subtlety, his courage, which seemed to defy both God and man, the unbounded ambition which he was known to cherish, justly rendered him the terror of Italy.

Nor was this magnificent project so visionary as modern historians have been inclined to consider it. The papal dominion in itself was one of the most extensive and powerful of all Italy, and was wielded by the intriguing and daring Alexander, a prince who, with all his vices, crimes, and inordinate lust of aggrandizement, possessed an extraordinary capacity. He was a Spaniard by birth, and to the sultry pas-

sions of his native land was believed to add all the refinements in dissimulation and treachery which centuries of slavery had taught the Italians. Age might probably have moderated the violence of his character, but the expiring volcano was continually restirred into action by the no less vehement, but more subtle genius of Cæsar Borgia, to whose vast plans his father's co-operation was essentially necessary.

Cæsar had been originally intended for the church, and during the lifetime of his elder brother, the Duke of Gandia, whose tragical and mysterious fate excites so gloomy a curiosity, he had worn the mantle of a cardinal. But the moment that assassination, perhaps involving a still blacker crime, had removed this shadow of an elder brother from his path, he threw off the purple, and seemed determined never again to resume it, unless as a king. His valour in the field, and the alliance of the French, soon raised him to a high rank among the Italian generals. The Pontiff created him his generalissimo, and by conferring upon him the Dukedom of Romagna, seemed to open the way to him of sovereignty.

But the chief obstacles to the execution of the vast designs of Cæsar Borgia were the very instruments which he was compelled to use. The papal power, like all the other sovereignties of Europe at the period, was feudal in all its ramifications. During the wars of the emperors and popes, the Roman barons had managed to usurp to themselves even greater privileges and more complete independence than any other nobility. The great possessions of the church

were held by them, with only a nominal submission, under the title of vicars. To break—to destroy the power of these nobles—became a great object of Cæsar's policy; to wrest back their usurpations was essential to the execution of his vaster plans. The animosities and factions among the nobility themselves assisted his projects, and his own subtle genius furnished him with innumerable engines.

Ages of mutual rivalry and wrongs had exasperated against each other the two most powerful Roman families, the Orsini and the Colonnas. With the impolitic aid of the former, the Borgias drove the latter into exile, and confiscated their immense possessions. Following up his successes, Cæsar, in two dreadful campaigns, distinguished by every species of barbarity, succeeded in destroying the power of nearly all the great families of Romagna. Meanwhile, Alexander crushed the rebellious spirit of the church by the exile, ruin, or death of a great many cardinals who opposed themselves to his tyranny, chiefly through resentment at the disappointment of the promises which he had made to secure his election.

While thus crushing their chiefs, Cæsar won, if not the affection, at least the goodwill of the common people, by substituting to the unbounded oppressions of their former masters a sway, which, however blood-thirsty and extortionate, was still a change for the better. The Roman nobility, like all that have been crushed, deserved their fate. The detail of their cruelties and oppressions form the blackest pages in the history of Italy. Dwelling in

vast fortresses, with unnumbered dependents existing only on war and plunder, they committed every species of disorder with perfect impunity—robbed, murdered, ravaged, made war on one another, and laughed to scorn the powerless suzerainty of a priest, even while reverencing to adoration his spiritual character.

With the aid of the French, Cæsar successfully pushed on his great project; but the Orsini and other powerful barons at length perceived their mistake in aiding him, even to the ruin of their enemies. Symptoms of disaffection daily increased, and when Cæsar's allies, the French, sustained their great defeats in Lombardy, an open combination was entered into against him. The tyranny and licentiousness of the French had provoked the miserable vanquished into revolt. Milan had succeeded in expelling the invaders, and welcomed back its unfortunate and blood-stained sovereign, Ludovico Sforza.

Far from aiding Cæsar in his designs on Tuscany, the French not only withdrew their troops from his service, but demanded that he should instantly march with his own to their aid. But the open defection of his most powerful adherents, and the uncertain tenure of his conquests, rendered Cæsar deaf to any promptings of gratitude. He remained among his conquests, busily engaged in cementing them, while the French generals awaited in inaction the arrival of their king with a new army with which he was preparing to ravage Italy.

Meanwhile the league against the Borgias assumed a formidable consistency. The dispossessed barons

assembled a considerable army on the frontiers of Romagna; the states of Milan, Ferrara, Pisa, the Florentines and Venetians, joined them in a powerful league. The French were believed to be exasperated with the defection of Cæsar during the revolt of Milan, and were besides scarcely able to retain their own position, driven to the foot of the Alps. The utter ruin of the Borgias seemed to impend; the deposition of Alexander was openly threatened. Cæsar himself appeared for a moment overwhelmed by the opposition which was formed against him; after sustaining several severe checks in arms, he had betaken himself to the resort of weakness—negotiation.

There were innumerable points of disunion in the confederacy, into which the subtle genius of the Borgias easily discerned how to drive their wedges. The Venetians and Florentines were divided by ancient grudges and rival pretensions; the feuds among the great barons were only lulled by the pressing perils without. The Bentivogli hated the Montefeltri; the Malatesta, the Sforza; the Perucci, the Baglioni; the Colonna, the Orsini; the Este, all. But the machinations of Cæsar appeared only in their effects. The Florentines sent him ambassadors to treat of a general peace; Ferrara made a truce with him, and the duke, Ercole d'Este, listened with eagerness to the proposals of Alexander, that his daughter, Lucrezia, should wed the heir of his ancient and glorious race. At the same time it was rumoured that Cæsar had cajoled the Orsini back to his interests, by offering the lady's hand to the heir

of that powerful family, Paolo Orsini, son to the Duke of Gravina.

There was now a short lull in the storm which ravaged Italy, but it was gathering blacker and blacker on every point of the horizon. While the French, Spaniards, and Turks, with their allies the Swiss, Burgundians, Germans, and Moors, and the Italians themselves, were collecting all their energies to struggle for the possession of the beautiful land, its coasts were devastated by pirates, its cities sacked by robbers, the plague spread death and desolation throughout its length and breadth. It seemed as if Heaven intended the total extirpation of the Italian race!

And yet, amidst all this chaos, the serene glory of the arts arose like the day-spring from a turbulent ocean. Leonardo da Vinci had painted his masterpieces, Michael Angelo was founding his school at Florence, Raphael and Julio Romano were crayoning their first rude creations; the young Cellini was moulding his beauteous fancies in gold. The recent conquest of Constantinople, by the Turks, filled Italy with learned exiles, who revived the ancient taste for Hellenic literature. Ariosto made Ferrara illustrious with the dawn of his beautiful genius, that rainbow spanning the heavens of poesy, whose very tears are but weepings of sunshine. But it was chiefly as a school of arms that the unlettered nations of western Europe regarded Italy; and many of the pilgrims who now hastened to obtain their share of the indulgences so liberally showered on the faithful in the jubilee at Rome, contemplated the recreation of a

campaign or so on their return, by way of indemnification for the fatigues they might undergo, nearly indifferent on what side they performed their achievements.

To this class, from their appearance, might be ascribed the leaders of an armed party which, towards the close of day, came slowly winding round the edge of one of those lofty precipices by which the Apennines descend into the plains of Umbria.

CHAPTER II.

THE PILGRIMS OF THE APENNINES.

“For, in this present volume may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue, and sin. Do after the good, and leave the ill, and it shall bring you to good fame and renown.”—CAXTON, *Prologue to the Mort d'Author*.

THE troop consisted of about twenty men, all well mounted, and wearing the usual accoutrements of the common soldiery of the age. The breast and back were protected with plates of steel, the head with a bassinet or cap of steel, and the rest of the person with stout embossed leather. Each was armed with a sword and lance, and to the saddle hung on one side a poleaxe, on the other a rude arquebuss of great size and weight, with conveniences to discharge it attached, in the shape of a coil of tarred rope, matches, and a flint. The rude fashioning of the armour, and the powerful limbs of the wearers, seemed to indicate men of some barbarian race, as the Italians still called and considered the transalpine nations. From the sprig of broom in the bassinets of the riders, a skilful herald would speedily have known that they were English,—the broom flower

being the cognizance of the kings of England, until the overthrow of the last of the Plantagenet race in the person of Richard III., an event which had taken place some dozen years previous to the commencement of our narrative. In addition to this badge, the soldiers wore another wrought in their mantles, a blazing sun, with the motto in the centre, "Oh ! mon Le Beaufort !"

The leaders of the party were literally so, for they kept considerably in advance of their troop, the immediate command of which was devolved on an inferior officer, as he seemed to be, who yet was not even of the lowest order of chivalry, as he did not wear the arms peculiar to an esquire. His accoutrements differed but little from those of his followers, but he carried a little flag or banderol on the point of his lance, and was furnished with a shield in addition to his arms of offence. So much of his visage as was visible from the steel cap, displayed a grim set of features, seamed with many a scar, short black hair, touched with gray, and a thick beard to correspond.

The foremost persons of the party were three in number. The eldest was apparently verging on forty, rode a mule, and from his habit was a secular canon. His features were long and sharp, his head rather bald, a capillary deficiency which he made up by a beard of patriarchal length and volume; his eyes were full of expression and gaiety, and from the joyous cast of the countenance he might rather be taken for a disciple of Anacreon than of Augustine.

Resuming our description by age, the next would

be a personage about thirty years old, of a tall and stately figure, who wore the habit of a Knight Hospitaller of St. John. A long black mantle, wrought in the left with a white cross in eight points, covered nearly his whole person ; his feet and arms only appeared, except the head, and were cased in brass mail. His helmet was carried by one of the attendants, and his white hood was drawn partially over his face to keep off the sun ; but the countenance which appeared from it was remarkable for the noble and austere beauty of its expression, shadowed with a deep cast of melancholy and pride. His black hair curling short round his temples and face, completed the effect of the high and imposing severity of character stamped on its princely lineaments. This expression was not unsuitable to the mingled professions of priest and warrior assumed by the Knights of St. John, who, in addition to their military devotion, were bound in the strict rules of chastity and obedience professed by the hermits of St. Augustine.

The third leader was apparently several years younger than the Knight of St. John, and from his golden spurs and arms was of similar rank, but of a lay order of chivalry. The elastic plates of silver mail in which he was clad from head to foot, displayed a figure of extraordinary strength and agility, though inferior in height to that of the Hospitaller, to whose gloomy garb his array brilliantly contrasted. The splendour of his appointments, indeed, amply supported the title, which from the emblazonment on his shield he seemed to have assumed, of the Knight of the Sun. His armour glittered like the lucid scales

of a fresh-caught salmon, and on his breast it was so skilfully wrought into a blazing sun, that the luminary appeared as if reflected in a mirror. He wore a cap of silver tissue, in which was a sprig of purple broom; and the joyous gallant countenance, which expressed careless good humour, reckless daring, and high spirits, well harmonized with the warlike combray of his array. His complexion had been originally very fair, and the long brown hair and blue laughing hawk's eye marked his northern descent. But the fierce sun of Italy had embrowned the skin wherever it was not usually covered by the helmet, and presented something of the effect of a bronze mask, which, however, gave a soldierly and veteran look to the otherwise youthful and blooming countenance.

For some time the travellers had been winding up the steep brow of an acclivity, on a road which was formed only by cutting down a few trees, the trunks of which still remained half hidden among the grass, and made the horses stumble every instant. On one side was a lofty succession of dark desolate hills, at whose base they proceeded; on the other stretched down a fathomless chaos of rocks, precipices, forests, and torrents, forming a mountainous valley, which seemed as if dashed together by nature in a fit of madness. Beyond the valley appeared a still vaster pile of hills towering one above the other like the Titans' stairs to heaven, until the topmost shone white as if with snow, and bounded the immense view.

The travellers proceeded for some time in silence, probably too fatigued for conversation, as they

seemed to have made a long journey, their horses' tongues hanging out, and their breasts covered with foam. The English knight had been humming a roundelay in his own language—the chief words distinguished being “Robin Hood, and the good greenwood.” But the still and sultry calm into which the evening gradually closed produced an effect even on his buoyant spirits.

“Messer Bembo,” he said at last, addressing the ecclesiastic in good Italian, but with a foreign accent; “methinks this castle of yours, if it be not removed by faerie art, should now be somewhere in sight.”

“I have noted the canon this last half hour or so, and he sometimes checks his mule as if he misdoubted his own guidance,” said the Hospitaller, with a quietly sarcastic smile.

“No, monsignor, no,” replied the ecclesiastic, with nevertheless a very puzzled countenance. “It is true that it is now seven years since I last found my way to my good friend Savelli’s castle; for since Ferrara and his holiness disagreed at the sword’s point, I have had but little occasion to go to Rome; and yet it distinctly appears to me as if in the old time it crowned the summit of this gorge, thereby commanding the pass, by the irrefragable sign that all who crossed the Apennines were compelled to come this way to pay their composition, and obtain the free leave and protection of my Lord Jacopo Savelli. He had a tower built over the road on purpose, and I myself once heard him order the portcullis to be driven down upon a gang of insolent traders of Genoa, who

refused to pay what he ordered them,—three crowns, I think it was, a head, with a velvet robe for my lady, and ten fine wax candles for his lordship's chapel."

"And did it spike any of the jolly burghers?" said the young knight, laughing heartily.

"Nay, the fright was enough for them;" replied Messer Bembo, laughing also until his eye suddenly lighted upon the stern and displeased countenance of the Hospitaller. "But I am the more certain that we are in the right way now I observe yonder mountain, resembling a white cone projecting among the clouds, at the end of that promontory of woody rocks."

"You are right as to the cone, Messer, but for the castle, by St. George, I do no more see it than the battlements of my father's strong place of Beaufort, in England!" said the young knight.

"Let us push on; perchance the walls may be hidden in the height," said Messer Bembo, pricking on his mule.

"Or perchance a cloud may be around it—and yet the summit shines very clear," said the Hospitaler. "What say you, Messer Canonico, if the Borgia, when he crossed these mountains on his late ravages in Tuscany, took the opportunity to destroy a fortress belonging to so noted an enemy of his name!"

"I say, then, my royal lord, that we shall lodge worse than I thought, to-night," replied Messer Bembo, dismally and with a sigh of weariness.

"How, Messer Pietro Bembo, will you ever forget my injunctions, and how much depends on their ob-

servation?" said the Knight Hospitaller, in an angry tone.

"Nay, monsignor, but the Borgias are all for making love to us now-a-days," returned the canon submissively.

"And are, therefore, the more to be feared!" replied the Knight of St. John. "The Borgias regard no faith, human or divine; and if they had me in their power would, perhaps, compel me into this infernal marriage with their demon daughter."

"Hush, or some of the fellows may hear us gabble, and only William of Bampton is to be trusted!" said the younger knight. "Not but that they are all very good rascals, and English to the backbone, but they are by no means aware of the wiles of this land, and oft mistake crafty wine for honest ale."

"Then, monsignor, I would say, reverend brother, I marvel what brings you to Rome, for he who shuns the wolf, should surely not hide in his cave?" continued Messer Bembo.

"If there be any time sacred with the Borgia, it will surely be this of the glorious Christian jubilee," replied the Hospitaller. "The vast multitude of pilgrims will render our arrival unnoted, and while the city is in their hands they will not suffer so crying an enormity as the molestation of one of their number. But," he continued with rising warmth, "no one knows better than thou, Pietro, my intent in journeying to Rome. Sithence my father is so

blinded by his fears and policy, that he will not believe the hideous rumours afloat concerning this modern harpy, on report, and would compel me to accept her direful hand, I have sworn to learn the truth of all with mine own avouch; and then, if he persists in his resolution, I will take this holy and unwedding mantle in very earnest, and spend the remainder of my days fighting for the redemption of the Holy Sepulchre."

"Your brother, Monsignor Hippolito, would be grieved to hear you talk so, sir," said the canon, smiling.

"I blame thee not for the word, brother in arms," said the English knight, in a more serious tone than his galliard mood often prompted. "For methinks (if it be no sin to say so) even the holy father's uncleship should scarcely coax me into uniting the honours of my house, though inferior to yours, (albeit we are cousins to the king's mother, the Lady Margaret,) to the bastard brood of Borgia."

"But their actions, their actions!—I look the rather to them!" said the Knight of St. John, with increasing vehemence.

"Look then what scant wisdom may come with gray hairs!" said Messer Bembo, smiling; "since the famously wise duke, Ercole, your father, consented to this project of your reverend lordship's solely in the belief that you would come back a convert to his own."

"Yea, for our poet legend-monger, Messer Ariosto, reports us such marvellous tales of this woman's

beauty, as if it were of Helen of Troy!" returned the Knight of St. John, colouring and smiling, but with a strong curl of contempt. "You look only to the outside of things, you poets, Bembo; you suspect not the serpent among the rosemary. But were she beautiful as Venus, she hath too many of the impudent goddess's other qualities, to win aught but scorn and hatred from a soul like mine. The woman whom I love, Sir Reginald, must be pure in name as in deed, in deed as in spirit, in spirit as yonder summit of snow which mingles whiteness with the heavens!"

"Then, by the mass, you must not seek for her in Italy," replied Sir Reginald, setting his cap aside on his handsome audacious features, and smiling significantly; "at least so far as my experience warrants."

"Ay, it is such as thou, Le Beaufort!—it is the perpetual wars of which you barbarians make Italy your battle-field, which is gradually trampling out every noble quality in this once heroic land!" said the Hospitaller, sighing deeply.

"Then where would you recommend monsignor rather to seek a wife?—taking it that he hath assumed this holy garb only for a carnival time?" said Bembo, somewhat testily.

"I have abode long with him in Italy—let him return with me to England!" said the young knight enthusiastically; "there he will find maidens infinitely more beautiful than your sun-scorched women here, and as innocent as the pearls they deck their ringlets withal!"

“Colourless ghosts are not to my taste, Messer,” replied Bembo, hastily.

“Colourless!—could you see my sweet cousin Alice!” said the young knight. “I remember her with cheeks as ruddy as any rose; and I loved her so well, that meaning to wed her to my brother Henry, I believe ’twas one of the reasons they sent me to these Italian wars. But since he fell by a Scottish lance they must have me home again, as if I were the sight of their eyes. Our Lady keep his soul!—but he hath left me a greater heir than ever I thought to be.”

“Amen!” said the ecclesiastic tranquilly, crossing himself. “But you must abate something of the sharpness of your tongue against the brown Italian ladies, if you hope to obtain the dispensation to wed your cousin that was betrothed to your brother, for ladies have some influence at Rome, or they tell great lies that come from it.”

“’Tis a traveller’s trick, they say,” observed the Knight of the Sun, slightly pricking his steed; “but I am not so unhandsomely put together as to be sorry for that. But, assuredly, Messer Bembo, your castle is one in the air, in many respects.”

“Yet Lucrezia Borgia is fair, not brown,” said the Hospitaller musingly, without noticing this latter observation.

“The duke your father was ever held to be a wise man,” said Messer Bembo slyly. “I have often heard it said that the golden-haired goddess herself was not fairer that day she sprang from ocean,

while the waters blushed rosy red with delight and shame to see her unveiled charms."

"You are in Messer Ariosto's vein this sunset, Pietro," said the Hospitaller, somewhat sadly; "but it needs a very inventive genius to speak well of this lady."

"By the bonny broom-flower! to be so very married a damsel, I did never hear of one who bore so very evil a report," said Sir Reginald, laughing; and striking his long lance against the trunk of a beech-tree which shadowed the path, he struck off a huge piece of bark, much apparently to his content.

"Married! truly, I am to be the fourth husband this lady hath honoured with her rapid affections!" said the Hospitaller, with a tart smile; "or perchance it were speaking it more to the matter to say—person."

"Nay, monsignor, for a knight and eremite of holy Austin you speak it harshly," said Messer Bembo. "The first espousals were when she was a mere child, and I doubt whether she ever saw the betrothed gentleman; for she had not left the convent when her sire dissolved the contract, as a match unequal to his new dignities. The Lord of Pesaro she quarrelled with;—let me see, no, it was not at the altar—but the divorce was pronounced by a very solemn and unprejudiced tribunal. Then for the third—Don Alfonso of Arragon—poor lord, he did not survive his marriage long!"

"Murdered—assassinated! Who knows if not by her connivance?" said the Hospitaller. "Well may

she be called in Rome the Fatal Bride!—and 'tis believed that I will consent to make the fourth! The first—mark you the gratitude of these Borgias!—was son of the Castilian gentleman who saved Alexander's life, in battle against the Moors of Granada, when, forsooth, he was a soldier! And yet, not satisfied with an ignominious breaking of the contract, he even compelled the old man to put his son in a manner to death by making a friar of him."

"My experience of friars, signor, leads me to think that many a ghost would be glad if you could prove the identity!" replied Bembo. "It is known how rash and headlong in all his passions the pontiff is—and was it not the very madness of gratitude to betroth a youth of twenty to a child in the cradle? And if he made a priest of him, it was probably to his good, that he might recompense his loss with the dignities and wealth at his disposal! I have heard it said, the young man was so deep a scholar, that he was fit for nothing but a Spanish bishopric or the president's chair at Bologna the learned!"

"The second!" continued the Hospitaller vehemently, as if vexed at the apology, "the second a dispossessed and shame-struck exile; the third gashed all over, then strangled! You shall pardon me."

"But may not the unhappy lady herself be innocent, whoever is guilty of these atrocities?" said Bembo earnestly.

"It is burned into my soul—those direful lines of Pontano!" said the Hospitaller, vehemently. "They were put in the mouth of the death's-head which was served to me at table, in a golden ewer,

that day my father feasted Cæsar's ambassadors, who brought the proposal of this black alliance."

He then repeated, in a dark and brooding tone, the hideous distich which has been one of the chief means of rendering the name of Lucrezia Borgia portentous in the ear of posterity.

"Lucretia, nomine, sed re—
Thais. Alexandri filia, sponsa, nurus."

CHAPTER III.

THE DOMINICAN.

“Man’s life is all a mist, and in the dark
Our fortunes meet us.”—DRYDEN.

A DEEP and somewhat awful silence followed for some minutes, and then Messer Bembo spoke in a low and timid tone in reply.

“Calumny spares not even the saints in bliss,” he said dubiously. “Then wherefore should a lying Neapolitan poet, who for the turn of an epigram, or to give it an acuter sting, would speak worse of the devil than he deserves, or of himself even, who is not so good a fellow !”

“Calumny hath not spared so reverend a man as yourself, Messer Pietro,” said the English knight. “Nay, she speaks even ill of me, who never gave her the least occasion which I could muster virtue to forego.”

“Thou art a very Sir Galaor indeed, who, they say, matched Sir Lancelot in everything but constancy,” said the Hospitaller, with a grave smile.

“Constancy !—the rogue,—to his king’s wife !” returned the Knight of the Sun. “You may mea-

sure his faith by his faithlessness: but in very sooth, Messer Bembo, I think your castle must have belonged to Fairy Morgana, and has sunk in the rocks as hers sink in the waves."

"By this good lamp of day, which is fast going out, on this summit once stood as fair a fortalice as nature and art, plotting together, could build!" said the canon, checking his exhausted mule, and staring amazedly around.

The three leaders had now reached a lofty table-land, formed by the summits of a vast rock, shaped as irregularly as if an earthquake had tossed a mountain in the air, and let it fall in fragments. The men-at-arms, on their wearied horses, straggling up the prodigious ravine after them, had disappeared, and by a singular illusion of the perspective, the amphitheatre of forests which towered one above another on the mountains beyond, seemed only separated by air. Before the travellers the rocks descended in layers of blue cliffs, densely clothed in pines and stunted oaks, until they formed two lofty walls, in which flowed a river, or rather torrent, the roar of which was audible, but the waves were lost in the darkness of the ravine through which they thundered. Based on the opposite cliffs, arose apparently an endless succession of mountains of a strange bluishly snowy tint, interspersed with masses of darkness which looked like the wavering shadows of vast forests. But after gazing for a few moments, the rapid changes of the shapes of these mountains convinced the travellers that it was an illusion produced by the sun setting behind those on which

they stood, and throwing a reflection of their outlines on the mists which arose steaming from the plains below.

“It was here, it was undoubtedly on this spot that the castle of Jacopo Savelli stood!” exclaimed Messer Pietro, glancing back in amazement at the endless succession of mountains, and the piles of rocks whose summits still glowed red-hot in the setting luminary. “I remember often bemusing how these cliffs resembled battlements of gigantic castles, such as the greater Morgan might have inhabited.”

“There are yet traces of walls, and yonder still stands a watch-tower hanging to a shattered battlement!” said the Hospitaller. “The spoiler’s work has been well done, for it looks as ruined as aught of the Roman time.”

The Hospitaller slightly pricked his horse with the spur, but the English knight suddenly clutched him back by the rein, exclaiming, “Sancta Maria!—see you not, monsignor, how long the grass grows! the ground is deeply hollowed.”

“Truly, and I thank you, brother Reginald,” said the elder knight, slightly startled. “The fortress has been destroyed with gunpowder, and it has rent some ghastly depths.”

“See you not, as it were, some huge words sculptured on the red cliff yonder, on which stood the donjon?” said Bembo, pointing opposite, across the ruins, to a rock which was the highest of the whole group.

“You are a scholar and may tell us—Father Am-

brosius could never get me beyond my letters," replied the young knight.

"It is Latin, but very legible even at this distance," said the Hospitaller. "We cannot move in Italy, but we find the traces of this ravaging beast: *AUT CÆSAR, AUT NIHIL*. But what is yonder? There are signs of more recent conflict than these grass-grown ruins announce." He pointed, as he spoke, with his lance to an object which attracted his attention, at the foot of one of the sharp precipices which edged the ruined fortalice. There sprawled a figure which, by the gleam of armour, and the inanimate manner in which it lay, appeared to be the corpse of a soldier.

"Perhaps the man may be only asleep; let us call him," said the canon, adding in a shrill and terrified tone, "Friend, in a holy name, who art thou?"

"If he be asleep, 'tis in a very dangerous spot," observed the Hospitaller. "The duty of the order I have assumed is to protect travellers; I will arouse him?"

And vaulting with practised agility from his powerful steed, he flung the reins to the canon, who shook so that he could scarcely take them.

"Nay, then, brother, you shall have a companion; these mountains are peopled with banditti, and this may be some ambush," said he of the Sun, dismounting with equal rapidity, and hastening to join the Hospitaller, who strode on before.

"Wait at least, good my lords, until our people

gather; for all our preservations, I adjure you!" groaned the prudent ecclesiastic; but the young knights seemed to take no notice of what he said.

"Oh, what a world is this below; but what a heaven there is above!" said the poetical canon, who looking devoutly up for celestial aid, was struck with the exceedingly beautiful blue of the sky, in which myriads of stars beamed silvery pale, though daylight lingered yet.

But he had scarcely uttered the exclamation when his attention was recalled to sublunary concerns by a sudden hiss and snarl close to the feet of his mule, which began to plunge violently, notwithstanding its weariness. Probably startled by the advance of the intruders, a wolf rushed out, and half rolled and half ran down a precipice to the right, in a panic fully equal to that of Messer Bembo. But dismayed at the apparition, he slid down from the mule, and leaving it wildly striking out with its heels in every direction in which it apprehended the enemy might approach, hastened to join his companions, whose lances he observed gleaming in the distance.

In the course of his progress, struggling with thorn bushes or plunging into hollows full of stagnant water, the canon perceived how it was that the fortalice had so nearly vanished. Large fragments of the ruins had been hurled among the precipices by the explosion which had destroyed it, and the rest was hidden by the rank and rapid vegetation which delights in covering decay. Stumbling among the ruins in his eagerness to rejoin his companions, Messer Bembo observed with extreme horror several figures

lying about among the bulrushes, whose immovability, strange attitudes, and garbs discoloured with blood and rain, convinced him that they were bodies of recently slaughtered men. Avoiding as much as possible even to glance at the direful forms, the canon at length reached the two knights, who were standing in discourse at the edge of the cliff which bore the inscription. The carcass which had first excited their attention lay directly below, partially stripped, and so gnawed by wolves and crows that the face was gone, and much of the body which was not defended by the steel garniture which it had carried. A bush of wild raspberries grew close beside it, and the ripe red fruit hung over the silent slain.

"This at least is probably not Cæsar's work," said the English knight. "Yonder are the embers of a fire, and a half-roasted kid ; they have been travellers surprised by banditti."

"Let us hasten away !" said Messer Bembo, crossing himself with more devotion than he had yet displayed. "Madonna herself can scarcely protect us against these villains !"

"Are we sure this is none of the Borgia's work ?" said the Hospitaller thoughtfully. "Note ye the badge in yon unhappy crow-pudding's murrion ? Mark you, Messer Bembo—the bear ? The Orsini's crest, whom he so hates !"

"The man is a very devil—that I should pronounce such a name—for who sits there ?" exclaimed the canon, turning white and blue by turns as he pointed up to a hollow in the cliff just above the triumphant inscription. A raven partially gray with his century

of years was perched on it, and seemed to watch the intruders with keen vindictive eyes.

“Again, I say, let us hence, in our blessed Mother’s name !” continued the canon ; “the night closes in, and if we do not find a lodging soon we shall get among the mists, and go headlong down some precipice which will not leave us a whole bone in our skins. I remember there is a monastery at no great distance, which he will not have destroyed, because it is a dependence of the Holy See. There, at least, we shall find shelter ; but for our fare I can promise little, because they are of a severe rule, and keep it.”

“And some of the good brothers will give these poor souls Christian earth to lie in,” said Sir Reginald. “Have with you, Messer Bembo ; come, brother, our tarriance here does the dead no good.”

The Hospitaller complied in silence, and they returned to the spot where Bembo had parted with his mule. They found the animal quietly munching some thistles, while William of Bampton stood with his gaunt figure erect in the stirrups, straining his eyes in amazement at the disappearance of the leaders. The men-at-arms had halted in a picturesque and disordered group among the rocks.

Under guidance of Messer Bembo the whole troop now filed down an excessively steep declivity facing the cloud-mountains which we have mentioned. It wound, he said, into the depths of the ravine, to the river, by whose course he hoped to find their way to the monastery, which was somewhere on its banks.

The precipitous character of the road, if road it could be called, soon compelled all the riders to dismount and lead their beasts, fearing lest they should roll overhead into the ravine—all, except Messer Bembo, who trusted more in the steadiness of his mule's feet than in his own.

The danger increased as they gradually became involved in the white mist, which made the air as thick and hazy as the steam of boiling water. But the increasing loudness of the roar of the river convinced them that they were pursuing the right path. At length they entered a narrow ravine cloven by a torrent on its way to the main stream, in which now flowed scarcely sufficient water to wet the hoofs of the horses. The rocks on each side gradually heightened, for the path was in truth a fissure in the mountains formed by some terrific eruption of their volcanic depths.

This path emerged by a narrow opening into the river. It was a stream of considerable depth, bordered on each side by lofty cliffs of volcanic strata, quite bare to the summits, where they were crowned by forests of the dismal pine. The river descended in so rapid an inclination, that but for the innumerable rocks among which its violent current churned and roared, it would have been impassable. The velocity of the torrent was further checked by the numerous deep caves in the bases of the rocks, in which the waters were diverted, sometimes into deep stagnant ponds, at others into whirlpools that played and flashed like ringy lightning.

Messer Bembo was rather puzzled, for he could

not, even with the assistance of resting his chin on his hand, exactly remember whether the monastery was above or below the entrance to the main stream. But as he recollected that it formed a cataract at some short distance above the monastery, the Hospitaller recommended that they should follow the course of the river until they ascertained whether they were above or below the fall.

By a singular phenomenon, not unusual in mountain atmospheres, the mist hung several feet above the level of the waters, so that the upper parts of the riders' persons were involved in it, while their steeds stood in a glassily clear air. The men-at-arms were ordered to halt where they were, while the canon and the two knights pursued the course of the river, to ascertain the point in doubt. Sir Reginald took a horn which hung to William of Bampton's saddle, and it was only on a signal blast from him that the wearied soldiers were to advance.

The horses gladly entered the bed of the cool waves, and after slaking their thirst, moved down the centre of the stream, which it was necessary to keep, the sharp rocks and deep gulfs allowing no passage along the base of the cliffs.

"These caves are said to be the haunts of dragons, where they brood over hidden treasures," said Messenger Bembo, smiling, but taking care to keep abreast with the Knight of St. John. "Yet for all I am with two such noble chevaliers, I could be very ill content to see the glittering green head poking out of one of them."

“Sir Reginald will have the first brush ; see you how he is urging on his horse ?” said the knight. “ But, look, what is yonder ? In sooth it resembles the vast, glittering back of a dragon weltering across our path !”

“ Ha, Madonna ! it is the edge of the cataract ! Hist, sir knight ! the uproar drowns my voice, and the thick-headed barbarian is making his horse capriole !” exclaimed the canon, clasping his hands. “ He will be dashed to pieces ; it falls to such a depth that it is lost in foam long ere it reaches the rock below !”

But the Hospitaller listened only to the first words of this warning, and dashing the spurs into his horse compelled it to gallop forward through the whirling waters, to the rescue of his brother-in-arms. As he approached, however, he discerned that it was not carelessness which was conducting the young knight as it seemed to inevitable destruction. His steed, terrified to madness with the uproar, was struggling furiously to break away, and in the contest for the mastery was rapidly getting down to where the smooth eel-like flow of the wave denoted the great depth of its current ere it overleaped the precipices in a cataract. In vain did the knight endeavour to control the furious animal’s violence, while his fearless spirit, and perhaps the danger of sinking under the weight of his arms in the waters, hindered him from seeking safety by leaping off. The destruction of the youthful chevalier seemed inevitable, when, as if sent by some direct and miraculous interposition, a tall

figure garbed as a Dominican monk rushed into the stream before it, whence no one could discern, and seizing the horse's head with mighty force, rather hurled than drove it headlong back on its haunches, and after a struggle as it seemed of main strength, compelled it to halt.

CHAPTER IV.

“I blame not him who discredits, for indeed, with the proof in my hand, myself could doubt it.”—*Truth's Troubles.*

“GRAMERCY, our Lady!—Gramercy, good sir monk! fie, to be a monk with an arm like thine, which could bear down a stand of pikes,” exclaimed Sir Reginald, panting for breath, and unclasping his gorget. “My cousin, fair Alice, must surely be praying for me now, to bring thee so in the very nick.”

“Your horse, sir knight, is in this instance the wiser animal of the two; he feels the danger coming,” replied the monk, hurriedly. “The torrent-wind! the torrent-wind!—call to your companions to make to the shelter of the rocks on this side, for I see it is tearing up the water along the whole line of the river to the left.”

Singular as was this intimation, the commanding tones and gestures of the monk induced Le Beaufort to act as if he clearly understood the nature of the approaching danger. He shouted and waived to his friends to quit the centre of the stream, and join him behind the projecting rocks, to which the Dominican had forced his courser to retreat. They had barely time to act upon the counsel, ere a rushing roar,

louder than the noise of the cataract, which seemed as if the mountains were rending in an earthquake, broke upon their hearing. Rider and horse stiffened alike with amazement and terror, for while the air where they stood was scarcely sufficient to lift the manes of their horses, a whirlwind of prodigious violence, which must have hurried them over the abyss, had they stood in its line of advance, roared along the left shore of the river, and drove the waters before it like a herd of snow-white bulls rushing over each other in mad confusion. Wind and waves thundered on to the edge of the cataract, where a singular phenomenon, sometimes observed in the mountainous regions of the north, took place. The wind, pursuing its impetuous career over the torrent, cleared away the mist which overhung it, in a circle, and for a few moments revealed a scene of great beauty and grandeur. The torrent might be seen foaming wildly down among vast rocks, until it reached the bed of a river which flowed through a narrow but richly wooded valley formed by an amphitheatre of rocks, the bases in their turn of mountains which towered above, until lost in blue sublimity. The amphitheatre opening directly in front, revealed an immense plain, bounded only by the Mediterranean, the waters of which were distinctly visible, rolling of a dark violet hue against the bright line of the sunset.

Midway down the ravine, through which the torrent thundered, although the eye at first scarcely noticed it, the rocks projected and receded in such a manner as to allow space and verge for the monastery

of which our travellers were in search. A wall running round the edge of some cliffs, and two old gray towers, were all that was visible of it among the windings of the rocks, and the shadows of the overhanging pine and beech trees. A bridge formed by a single arch, bare and undefended, spanned a narrow neck which the opposite cliffs formed below the monastery, and no other means of approach could be discerned. But the whole landscape vanished almost immediately, for when the whirlwind had passed, the mists again arose in their cloudy masses.

"They will feel this wind, ere many hours elapse, on the sea," said the Dominican, as if following with his gaze the career of the tempestuous visitor.

"The Holy Virgin have pity on mariners then," said Le Beaufort, crossing himself.

"And on all men; all need it," returned the monk.

"Surely the devil rode in it, with his whole sabbath of witches," continued the astonished English knight. "But how, brother, by what rare gift did you behold this wind coming?"

"Nay, 'tis a four-footed beast that sees the wind," replied the monk, somewhat churlishly, for he spoke without the least appearance of jocularly.

"Holds the proverb true of your red Italian pig?" said the knight, good-naturedly smiling. "Howbeit, I am your debtor, and I pray you take this gold chain of thirty links, and hang it on your holiest shrine, an offering from Reginald Le Beaufort. Nay, 'tis no unlawful plunder, but a reward given me by the noble Duke of Ferrara that day his son and I kept the

lists at Fossombrone against all comers, for one mortal rise and set, without once being worsted. What ails the man that he will not take it?"

"I am a humble brother of the beatified Dominic, and not of the Carthusians who inhabit this solitude, to whose saint your offering is due," replied the Dominican, glancing at his white habit. "But you may well mistake these bedabbled robes for russet. From Ferrara? Methought your Italian rung with a touch of the tramontane iron in it!—You and these gentlemen are doubtless of France?"

"St. George forbid, or that I should mate with caitiffs who fly at the blast of an English trumpet, as if it were Roland's," exclaimed Sir Reginald. "And foul fall the day when any Englishman shames to say as I would in the world's teeth—I am one. These gentlemen, my friends, are worthily approved Italian knights, belonging to the Duke of Ferrara."

"How say you, sir? when one is a black Knight of St. John, the other an ecclesiastic," exclaimed the monk.

"True, I had forgotten, my brains are whirling on a mill-wheel," muttered the English knight, confusedly; and the canon, who had several times made an effort to break the conversation, although the roar of the waters prevented his hearing distinctly what was said, hastened to the rescue.

"We are all on a holy vow to the jubilee," he said. "But methinks we shall be starved, or blown to death, or murdered by banditti, on the road, unless some Christian will guide us in mercy to a shelter."

The priestly knight's hood was blown back by the

wind, in his rapid advance, and the Dominican surveyed him as it seemed with a particular degree of attention from the depths of the cowl in which his own countenance was so completely shaded as almost to baffle scrutiny. But the singularly fiery gleam of his eyes, the haggard outline of the features duskiy discernible, his great stature, and the musical depth and sweetness of his voice, were potent challenges to curiosity.

“I will do my endeavour, for I seek some such matter myself, brother,” returned the monk. “More especially as—but that it is well known that Monsignor Don Alfonso has crossed the Alps, I could almost have dreamed, despite that sacred habit, that I beheld the prince himself in the weeds of a Knight Hospitaller.”

“Nay, there are many gentlemen in Italy who resemble the good Duke Ercole, for I never heard that he was a hater of the fair,” said Messer Bembo, hastily interposing. “But prithee how is this convent to be reached, for we have already been disappointed in a castle, where we had made up our minds to sup and sleep? but man proposes—the proverb rhymes.”

“But is surely not often true, or where are we to look for refuge?” replied the Dominican, in a mournful and musing tone. “I was seeking a path in these rocks by which to descend to the valley below the torrent, in which the convent is situated, when I heard your horse’s struggles. But there is a truer proverb than yours, Messer Canonico, that, what strips the sheep clothes the hedge, for ’tis an extreme

misfortune to a noble gentleman which has brought me hither to be your guide."

"What hath happed, I pray you?" said the canon, with great eagerness.

"I bear news which will spread a general consternation in Rome," replied the Dominican. "A most noble gentleman of the Orsini family, passing through these mountains with few attendants, on a secret mission, 'tis said, from the confederated barons to our Holy Father, has been seized by banditti, and his retinue murdered. Yesternight, returning from Loretto, I was surprised by a party of the same band, who would have forced me to grant them absolution."

"And you refused, brother?" interrupted Bembo, startled at the magnanimity of the deed.

"Yea, though they threatened to roast my feet off at a slow fire," replied the Dominican, calmly. "Finding that I was inflexible, they offered me my liberty on condition that I took a message from them to Rome, demanding a ransom of ten thousand gold crowns for their prisoner's redemption. At first I refused, whereupon they blindfolded and led me to some cavern in these rocks, known only to themselves, where they have confined the Orsino. After showing him to me at a distance, chained to a rock, in which was sculptured a colossal crucifixion, the captain of the robbers, or disbanded soldiers, for I know not which they are, swore to me that until some messenger, and but one, returned with the ransom, the unfortunate gentleman should neither taste

of food nor drink, were it to be but one day or all time."

"Monsters without faith, hope, or charity!" exclaimed Messer Bembo.

"Why then pause you even for an instant, brother?" said the Knight of St. John.

"It is not long since they released me, after vainly attempting to move them to mercy; and, as I have told you, I cannot find the way to the valley below," replied the monk.

"Can you not guide us to the place where these banditti await their ransom; I bear one in my scabbard," said Le Beaufort, with his characteristic impetuosity.

"Your ancestors, indeed, have fought at great odds, but not as one to forty," said the Dominican.

"We are more than muster here," replied Le Beaufort. "A wind of my horn summons twenty stout fellows, whose flesh hath borne iron so long, that it something partakes of its qualities."

"It were in vain; the brigands know all the passes of these mountains, and could easily elude our search, and would perhaps murder their prisoner in their rage," said the Dominican. "But I will tell you a strange imagination which haunts me. How we entered the cavern I cannot divine; they bandaged me high up in the mountains, and when they suffered me to remove the fillet, I found myself in a craggy cleft, overlooking the hollow rocks which form the cave. But I noticed a yawning mouth of granite at one extremity, and from the foaming clouds which every

moment rushed in, and the infinite uproar, I imagined that it was below the fall of some torrent. Moreover, the crucifixion helped to kindle my suspicions."

"Suspensions, brother, in so blessed a sign?" interrupted the canon.

"Hear me out, master canon," said the Dominican, in the same imperturbable narrative tone. "The disciple of St. Bruno, who, three hundred years ago, founded a convent of his order in these mountains, was an anchorite who abode in a cavern over which this torrent falls—a blessed silence compared with the distracting tumults of the world. With his own hands he struck a crucifixion out of the solid rock, which is recorded among the good deeds which enabled the church to canonize him among her triumphant warriors. He died one night alone in his cell, and when the Carthusians came to bury him, they found that his body was gone, and only a heavenly perfume remained, as if angels had been there. Many pious pilgrims came to visit the cave, but as no other means of entering it were known but by passing through the cataract, so many lost their lives in the attempt that it was at length forbidden by a papal bull to make it. Yet, I cannot help thinking, there must be some secret entry to the cave, which the Carthusians may have concealed, as there were rumours raised that the saintly founder was assassinated on account of the extreme severity of his government, and which the robbers may have accidentally discovered."

"'Tis a strange tale, indeed, to be true," said Messer Bembo with a slight sneer. "But if matters

stand thus, I would advise you to hasten on your journey to Rome."

"The Orsini have good reasons for keeping their treasures out of Rome, and I doubt if, even in this exigency, and to redeem the heir of their great house, they could raise ten thousand gold crowns anywhere nearer than Venice—too late to save the young lord from his menaced doom!" returned the monk, eyeing the Hospitaller with keen attention.

"The heir of the Orsini!—what, Signor Paolo?" exclaimed the latter with visible interest, adding in a colder tone, "Why, since the Borgias intend him for their son-in-law, the rusty ducats of the Vatican will surely be forthcoming were the sum ten times to be told."

The monk laughed, but it was gloomily and derisively, without the least tinge of mirth.

"If you listen to the little birds singing, an' they be wise, ye will hear them say little on that matter," he said. "'Tis known what remarkable love the Borgias have as yet shown to their sons-in-law, and I see not why they should display less tenderness towards one who is also the great strength of their rebels against them, whose subtlety, if any can above ground, matches their own."

"In the plain vulgar tongue, brother of St. Dominic, tell us what you mean?" adjured the canon, with a bewildered stare.

"Moreover, duke Valentino is at Faenza, carrying on his siege there, and the Pope is not so headstrong and fierce as of old, and does nothing without direc-

tion," returned the monk, apparently avoiding a direct answer.

"Is not Cæsar's lieutenant, Don Remiro, that wolf of justice who hath so nigh extirpated the Black Bands, to be found in Romagna?" said the Hospitaller. "Tut, tut, there is always a long stream of blood flowing from his abode whereby to find him."

"Force were of no avail; they will flee and take their secret with them," replied the Dominican. "Moreover, Paolo is probably at this moment dying of cold, hunger, and terror, in the dismal cavern below. But I marvel not that friends to the Duke of Ferrara should be willing to let his son's rival perish, even by so terrible a doom."

"Now, by our Lady's tears at the cross, I will not leave these mountains until I have redeemed Paolo Orsino, or shared his fate," exclaimed the generous Hospitaller, with sudden vehemence.

"And as we are the very cow and calf of knight-hood, by the same, I will not leave you until this matter be determined," said Sir Reginald; and, raising his horn, he blew a cheerful blast: but he had no great occasion for that expenditure of breath, as the men-at-arms, wearied and alarmed at the long delay, came straggling into sight.

"It is a profane and heathen tempting of Providence, a wicked oath, from which I absolve you both," said the canon, infinitely alarmed; but without heeding his dehortation, the knights entreated the monk to endeavour to recollect if he had no clue by which to guide them to the adit possessed by the robbers. He shook his head mournfully.

“Then let us even take the blessed saint’s own way, and clamber up the torrent,” said the gallant English knight.

“It is possible the Carthusians may have some tradition left, which may be easier to follow than you might find it to climb a rope of water,” replied the Dominican. “At all events the night is coming, and you will need torches. Moreover your armour must be laid aside in such an attempt, for it requires the litheness of the serpent to glide among those slippery chasms, where a false step is perdition. Therefore let us in the first place find out our way to the monastery,—and yonder methinks—nay ’tis certain—is the cleft for which I have been searching so long.”

CHAPTER V.

“By the pricking of my thumbs
Something wicked this way comes.”—*Macbeth*.

THE sun was now completely set, and the shadows of the rocks had shifted, so that some which had been concealed projected, and others vanished into darkness. A red glare down a pile of massy rocks crowned with pines of immense height, the trunks of which were so weather-stained as to seem of old rusty iron, revealed a steep and very narrow defile, which, after ascending for a short time, apparently broke off abruptly in mid air.

But on reaching the summit, under guidance of the Dominican, the travellers found that the path continued, descending through a sloping forest, which clothed the sides of one of those wild sierras. Thence, by a winding succession of precipices over the torrent, they emerged on a species of platform of bare rocks, on which one side of the bridge rested.

To cross this bridge, which was scarcely wide enough for a single passenger, which had no parapet, and which seemed to shake with the thunder of the cataract, whose white waves rolled at a ghastly

depth below, appeared scarcely a possible feat for a horseman. But Le Beaufort, laughing at the canon's exclamations of terror, set spurs to his horse, and crossed the bridge at a gallop, waving his hand in triumph when he reached the opposite ledge. The Knight of St. John followed more leisurely, but with even greater coolness, for he checked his steed in the centre of the bridge, and surveyed the cataract with calm attention.

The waters rushing in a vast body over the highest pile of rocks, fell in one headlong sheet to another which jutted considerably, and on which they dashed themselves into a sea of foam, rolling over in a hundred separate torrents, which in their turn were flung and torn to pieces on the precipices they encountered in their descent. The hollow darkness below the projecting rocks of the second fall, marked the entrance to the cavern; but the Hospitaller's attention was caught by a strange red glow on the impetuous waters which rolled over it, as if from some fire within. As he gazed, it died out, and he was left in doubt whether it was an illusion of his imagination, or some phenomenon peculiar to those volcanic regions.

Meanwhile the canon was shouting lustily to him to cross and leave the way clear, for although in mortal trepidation, there was no resource but to follow. The canon's mule took the bridge steadily, while he himself endeavoured by stretching both arms to assist in keeping the balance. But whether from the force of imitation, or from some good reason of its own, the mule paused directly in the

centre of the bridge, and in spite of all the canon's earnest entreaties and caresses, for he dared not provoke it to open mutiny by blows, would not stir a single inch until William of Bampton, who followed, pricked it boldly in the haunch with his spear. Setting its tail, and uttering a shrill cry, the mule then tremblingly advanced, and, by slow degrees, during which the canon crossed himself a hundred times, they reached terra firma in safety. The men-at-arms followed in an orderly file.

The Dominican brought up the rear, and as the twilight had now deepened into darkness, the knights awaited his passage with some anxiety. Both the Hospitaller and Sir Reginald perceived him reach the middle of the bridge, where he too halted, as if struck with some object before him, to which he visibly pointed. The knights looked in the direction indicated, and again observed the mysterious glare lighting up the torrent with extreme splendour, for an instant. When they looked round, the monk had disappeared.

All united in declaring that he had not crossed the bridge, neither had any one observed him return, or fall. Exceedingly alarmed and surprised, the two leaders dismounted and crossed over the bridge in search of their guide, but could discern no traces of him, nor obtain any reply to the shouts with which they almost overpowered the unceasing roar of the waters. If he had fallen over, he must certainly have been instantly dashed to pieces, and his shattered carcass hurried away by the rapid stream. But those black depths denied all means of ascertaining,

and the only contrary hope which they could devise, was that the monk had taken panic at the prospect of the enterprise in which he had engaged them, and had withdrawn from any share in its prosecution. With this thought, however, mingled a superstitious feeling, which, although none avowed, all felt, and which both the appearance and disappearance of the stranger were well calculated to excite.

Engaged in sombre rumination on their adventure, the travellers at length proceeded on their way, guided by the distant chaunt of the Carthusians at vespers, and reached a massive gate between two high cliffs, formed of slender pine-boles, welded together with iron. A twisted brass horn, finely polished, hung as at the drawbridge of some giant's castle in old romance ; which, when Sir Reginald blew it, gave out a singularly wild screeching blast, being probably fashioned so as to utter a shrill cry which could be distinguished amidst the noise of the near waters.

There was a short pause, and then an old monk made his appearance, after withdrawing two vast wooden bolts. He wore the dull red Carthusian garb, fastened round the waist by a rope, to which hung a wooden cross ; but true to his obligation of silence, he made no reply to the knight's request to be allowed shelter for the evening, beyond pointing to the monastery which was immediately in front.

With this tacit permission they continued their road, and arrived at a narrow causeway, by which they ascended to a still narrower portcullis, above which, piled among the rocks, and sometimes perhaps cut in their substance, arose the monastery. Knock-

ing with their spears at the gate, a monk appeared at the window of a tower above the portcullis, and after reconnoitring, set some machinery in motion, by which the portcullis was raised. They then found themselves in a long narrow yard, cut in the rock, on each side of which were caves artificially excavated, and which were probably intended to be used by travellers as stables. Immediately they had entered, the portcullis was lowered behind them, and having performed this duty, the janitor himself descended.

The monk was a lay brother, and seemed to be exempt from the periodical fit of silence to which the Carthusian rule subjects its members. He received the travellers with bland courtesy, and regretted the badness of the accommodations which he had to offer, especially as the best at his disposal were already occupied by a numerous company of soldiers, escorting the ambassador of Florence to Rome. He added, that the prior was at vespers in the chapel, but would see them as soon as he had concluded his devotions; pointed out what premises were unoccupied in the rock-stables, and where they might find straw for their horses, and invited the commanders to follow him into the monastery forthwith. He then led the way up a very steep succession of stairs, cut at intervals in the rock, and ushered them into the great hall of the convent.

As this apartment had formerly been a natural cavern, it presented an exceedingly gloomy aspect, being of great extent, with windows only on one side, hewn in the solid granite, and set exceedingly deep. It was crossed at intervals by archways, marking the

termination of many flights of stairs, leading by galleries to the upper parts of the monastery. In the centre of the hall was a long stone table, with benches of the same material immoveably fixed, for they were cut in the rock. A pulpit, supported on a pillar, was similarly sculptured in the wall, from which a monk usually read some passages of the Scriptures or homilies during every meal. Five or six pinewood torches were stuck in holes at far intervals in the granite, and shed a dismal swarthy light, the gloom of which was not diminished by the enormous pile of red embers which glowed on the hearth in a cave, or rather chimney, at the extremity of the hall.

The travellers found here the party with whom they were to share the hospitality of the alpine fathers. In addition to several long-bearded, silent Carthusians, who were engaged in attendance on their guests, the stone table was occupied by some thirty men-at-arms, feeding on a kind of black barley bread, cheese, curds, and milk. Beside each man, crossing the table, lay a spear nearly double his own height, its point barbed like a fish-hook, so that on being withdrawn from a wound, the flesh must be fearfully lacerated: their armour was at once strong and rich, bright from the smithies of Milan, and apparently manufactured in imitation of the ancient Roman military garb—greaves of polished steel, bare knees, short kilts of quilted steel, breast and back pieces of gleaming plate, helmets surmounted by silver eagles with outspread wings and sun-soaring upward gaze. A round shield with a pike in the centre, a short sword, and a massive mace intended

to knock those on the head whose armour denied the sword access when overthrown, completed the uniform.

It needed not the additional emblem of Cæsar Borgia's motto encircling the arms of the church in their mantles, to inform the new comers that they beheld a detachment of the terrible guard of that leader, known throughout Italy for their cruelties and valour. He had selected this body from almost all the nations which battled in Italy, and principally of those whose ferocity and crimes had rendered them outcasts even from the direful armies which disgorged them, and whose wild wolf natures he alone had found it possible to control. Accordingly their complexions presented almost every hue, from the sable Moor to the white-haired German; but all were men of great stature, and remarkable for thew and muscle only to be acquired by lives of toil, and the fierce exercise of war.

Seated in a vast wooden chair, a seat of distinction usually appropriated to the superior of the monastery, for all the other seats were stools, basking as it were in the warm refulgence of the fire, sat a personage whom this formidable escort attended. He was a man in the prime of life, of a good stature, somewhat spare in flesh, with sharply defined, but handsome Italian features. His eyebrows had an habitual curve downward, as if accustomed to brooding thoughtfulness, the mouth in repose had an expression of singular unhappiness; but whenever they broke from this musing calm, the eyes and features lighted up with a satirical, and yet

jocose brilliancy, and his smile was full of humour and vivacity.

This personage wore a long crimson cloak, probably the ensign of some dignity, for the rest of his garb was of dark velvet, and, for an age delighting in rich garnitures, exceedingly plain. He was apparently amusing himself with watching the gambols of one of those unhappy attendants on ancient grandeur, whose office it was to entertain their rude lords with the vagaries of their disordered and reckless wits, whose brightest sparkles indeed were supposed to be caused by the flaw in the understanding, as a broken mirror distorts and splinters the light into effects more curious and brilliant than the smoothest surface.

The fool or jester in question, however, was evidently no ordinary member of the hairbrained fraternity. His figure, as displayed in his motley garb, was remarkable for its grace and suppleness, and although not powerful, and of common height, yet its exceeding limberness and serpent-like vivacity of movement would have made even a gladiator pause with the feeling with which the strongest eye any animal of the reptile species ere attacking it. His features, as well as could be ascertained amid the grotesque daubing and patches which covered it, were fine in outline and almost femininely delicate in finish. His mouth might have been called beautiful, but that when at rest, it remained parted with a slight, but very odious expression of bloodthirstiness. But the eyes were the most singular; they were set very deeply under

his perfectly arched brows, and might without any exaggeration been compared to diamonds in sparkle and infinite variety of tint—sometimes a glow merely with unmeaning glitter, at others flaming with strange wildness and the multitudinous feverish fancies of a mind diseased.

The jester was busied in playing with or rather teasing two enormous bloodhounds which shared the hearth with him, endeavouring with many antic tricks and allurements to induce them to put their great paws into the hot embers to draw out some chestnuts which he was roasting. The dignitary was so absorbed in laughing at this dangerous sport, that he scarcely noticed the arrival of the new guests, until the clank of armed feet startled him. Glancing round, and observing the chivalric strangers, he arose to salute them. The fool stared at them with a lack-lustre gaze, and then shaking his shaggy red hair over his face, as if the matter in nowise concerned him, resumed his divertisement with the dogs.

“Have I really the happiness, in this step of my painful pilgrimage, to encounter your worthiness, Messer Machiavelli of Florence?” exclaimed the canon, in a tone by no means so joyful as his words, but perceiving that subterfuge would be in vain, and that the ambassador had immediately recognised him.

“And if *he* pleases not your reverence, there is only another to send for,” said the jester, pointing downward with a very expressive gesture; then giggling

vacantly, he stirred the embers with an iron pole kept for the purpose.

"Mean you the devil or Cæsar Borgia, lad?" said the ambassador, smiling. "But do I behold the mirror of Parnassus, the quintessence of all learning and ingenuity, the Hercules of theology, in the person of Messer Bembo of Ferrara, lean canon of a fat cathedral?" he continued, in a highflown but somewhat ludicrous tone of compliment. "If I obtain no other reward for my journey across the Apennines, this is sufficient. But surely your party is not so much in favour at Rome, my dear Pietro, as to render a penitential journey thither of any particular advantage to your affairs?"

"I do not go to solicit a benefice, signor," replied the canon rather testily. "Neither are faith and good works so altogether out of date as to make mine and these noble knights' journey to Rome at this season so marvellous a miracle as to stare a man's eyes out. But how chances it that the secretary of the magnificent signory is on his way to the capital of the enemy?"

"We want not the Medici home in the republic, and as all the rest of you are making your peace with the church, I see not why we should be so unchristian, not to say so mad, as to hold out alone," replied the ambassador. "And this their magnificences have deputed a plain man to say to the Holy Father. But what are the latest news in the north? I warrant they scent as far down the wind at Ferrara as in the Val d'Arno."

“All I know is, that I go to Rome for my sins, and on no embassy, unless I find occasion to apologise for our young prince’s unavoidable journey to France,” replied the canon.

“Nay, troth, he is better there than with t’other Don Alfonso, among the worms,” said the zany, staring with his glittering and yet vacant eyes on the Knight of St. John.

“Why if you bring your sins to Rome, where are all the pretty damsels we might expect to see in your train, master canon?” said the Florentine, laughing.

“It makes no matter how many; there is room for all the world at Rome, and his wife, as well as paramour,” continued the fool. “And then if Rome should sink with the weight of you, the bottomless pit would be long in filling, uncle—but, however, they would make room below, for they are very polite people there, as right they should be, being chiefly courtiers and great personages that have left their names in chronicles—such as your king, your great general, your wit, and your poet—folks that would be knocking their heads against the stars.”

“But have you faithfully, brother Pietro and schoolfellow, no business in Rome but to do your soul good?” said the Florentine, with an acute gaze.

“And if I had, brother Niccolò, I have been your schoolfellow to more purpose than to let my secrets flutter to every wind,” replied the canon, with affected cheerfulness. “Yet truly I am glad to see you safe from the lion’s den, as I call Monsignor Borgia’s

camp. 'Tis a comfort to remark even one returning claw-print in the sand."

"And truly I am sorry to hear this news of your prince's running away from the gorgeous alliance offered him with the Cæsar's sister," replied the Florentine, with a vexed look. "The Orsini will have it all their own way, and if they conclude their marriage—woe to Tuscany."

"Yes, yes, let the bear try what sort of a wedge his paw will make," said the fool, laughing and chuckling. "Did his reverence the fox see aught of the Orsini claws in the sand, when he looked which way the beasts were going?"

"Now, by'r Lady, for a fool you have hit well in the bull's eye with a random bolt!" exclaimed Sir Reginald. "Do but hear, Signor Ambassador, what we have discovered, and judge if Cæsar's friends be any safer than his foes."

"Why, what history is this that hath a miserere before it?" said Messer Machiavelli, with an expression of sudden and strong interest; and even the fool leaned forward, but almost instantly resumed his careless attitude. "Now for a good tale, or let it not be about the Borgia; for our palates are high-seasoned with the tidings we hear of him at every step," said Machiavelli, with a glance at the jester, who joggled his head about, making the little silver bells ring a very gay and musical peal.

The canon was about to commence the narrative of their late singular adventure, when he was luckily spared the trouble of repeating it to two sets of listeners by the entrance of the prior and a long train of Car-

thusians, from their devotions. The monks all advanced in solemn silence, their heads sunk humbly on their breasts, the superior himself so worn with vigils and fasts, that his gaunt and powerful form seemed like that of a huge skeleton. He was the only one of the group who uttered any word of welcome to the new guests, yet he received them with a grave austerity which could scarcely be called so, and a general air of apathy which age and solitariness might well contract.

Machiavelli abruptly terminated the canon's oratorical request for hospitality by demanding the details of the circumstance relating to the Orsini to which he had alluded. Messer Bembo began a very eloquent narration, but Le Beaufort, wearied of his discursive progress, broke in, and told the story in as many words as the former intended to have used sentences. He concluded by requesting the prior to inform him if he knew any means by which the cavern might be searched, and the truth or falsehood of the information they had received ascertained.

"Did ye all dream this at once, or did one fool make many?" said the jester, with a strange laugh of derision. "What needs it, uncle Niccolò, to take me as a present to the pope, when these gentlemen are going of their own accord?"

"A civil tongue keeps a sound skin, fool," said the Florentine significantly.

The prior, whose brows had been gradually darkening, now observed, "All this is impossible, that you have been told—some wandering maniac's dream? No one among us has ever heard of any other means

of access to the saint's cell but through the cataract, in which enterprise so many of the faithful have perished that it has long been prohibited."

"I have heard, when I was a novice," faltered out an ancient monk, bent nearly double with the weight of a hundred years,—“I have heard . . . what have I heard?—some way to the cave among the rocks . . . Father Ambrosio could have told . . . but he has been dead sixty years and odd, come Candlemas again. The winter was very cold, and he had long had a cough—poor man, he died very hard—Amen!—I mean, Saint Guidobald keep his soul."

"Perchance they have seen the Bad One in the likeness of that blessed saint, to put them all on breaking their necks," suggested the jester, with a look of great gravity and deliberation.

"The holy hermit, Saint Guidobald!—'tis not the first time that men have seen his likeness wandering about the cave where his canonized bones repose," said the centenarian. "But he appears only to men in mortal sin, to warn them of their approaching end."

"Nay, for he that appeared to us wore not the Carthusian habit, but that of learned Dominic," said Messer Bembo, with a shudder. "You learn to speak and think very dismally, brother, among these great, sprawling, ghostly pine forests."

"We learn to die," said the prior, with melancholy austerity.

"Alas! it is an art which we all acquire at the first trial," replied the canon.

"What ye took to be the white robes of a Domi-

nican, were, in truth, the folds of his shroud in which they wrapped our saint ere the angels came," said the ancient monk, with the obstinate fidelity of age to its opinions.

"Then, perchance, Saint Guidobald is at last tired of his neglected grave, and would have his bones brought to the monastery, to be enshrined and work miracles like another," said the Florentine.

"Deem you so, signor?" returned the prior, obviously struck with a fancy which chimed in harmoniously with the dominant ideas of the age. "And truly, as to bandits—none have been seen or heard of since Don Remiro was podestà of Romagna, for they must all either hang or enlist under the Duke's banner."

"But we saw with our own eyes the carcasses of the Orsino's men, on the spot where was once Jacopo Savelli's castle!" exclaimed Le Beaufort. The prior looked at him somewhat incredulously, and then observed, "If it be so, let us wait till daylight, for else it were dangerous lest the robbers resist."

"To-night, to-night! not a single instant will I delay," said the Hospitaller, impetuously. "Tomorrow may be too late; they may remove or slay him. Let every Christian man among you take a torch and follow me!"

"What say you, fool, is not this an enterprise for thee to meddle in?" said Messer Niccolò.

"Nay, I will look on and see fair play; strike away, boys, ye cannot hurt me," returned the buffoon, with a listless yawn.

"If you are resolved, our brothers shall lend you

such assistance as may be," said the prior; "but you will find your undertaking is impossible."

"Let us then to work, and I pledge my knighthood we will do nothing that is impossible, father," said Le Beaufort, himself setting the example by snatching a blazing branch from the fire. Even the Carthusians awakened from their usual apathy, and set to work with eagerness to kindle torches, and the ambassador's escort looked at him with the eyes of hounds in the leash.

"Yea, since all Christians are to be aiding, let your cutthroats loose, uncle," said the fool; and it seemed they needed no farther permission, but riotously joined in the enterprise. All the conventuals, except such as were disabled by extreme age, also followed the knights to the yard where the English soldiers were engaged in stabling their horses, leaving the ambassador and his fool nearly alone in the hall.

"Come, master, let us be mad with the rest; 'tis not enough to be fools this weather," said the jester, after pausing for some moments as if in thought, and seizing the ambassador's long cloak, he danced fantastically after him down the hall, as if officiating as a train-bearer.

Messer Niccolò seemed to take little notice of his elvish attendant, until they had passed the outer gate of the monastery, and beheld the glare and smoke of the torches vanishing and appearing in the windings of the rocks which descended to the bed of the torrent. He then paused, and turning with a smile of unutterable meaning to the jester, and changing his tone to one of profound respect—"What says

your grace?" he observed in a low voice. "Will this turn out aught but a sick man's dream?"

"I shall begin to believe in miracles, Niccolò, an' it do; I that deal in them!" replied the other, in a tone of sarcastic levity. "Migueloto seldom half does his work; he has but one vice which is not useful to me—he is avaricious, Niccolò, avaricious!—But he is a sponge which, when full, I may, perchance, take a fancy to squeeze into my treasury; for without money, Niccolò, without money we can do little good in this world. Let us take our seat on the bridge, and watch these fools tumble down the precipices. But where are my hounds?—Ho, Sylla and Marius!"

"They are gone with the rest; they scarcely know you in your fool's garb, my lord," said the Florentine.

"If I thought the fiend would not, I would sooner die in it than in a monk's," returned the jester; but he seemed scarcely pleased with the desertion of his dogs, and whistled and called them for some time in vain ere he appeared to think it was so. Meanwhile Messer Niccolò had quietly quitted the path followed by the torch-bearers, and turned into that which led to the bridge.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DISCOVERY.

"Cosa non detta in prosa mai nè in rima."—ARIOSTO.

Thing never told before in prose nor rhyme.

COMMANDING a view of the whole scene of operations, the ambassador and his jester could scarcely have chosen a better point whence to contemplate them than the centre of the bridge, which spanned the river like an arch of darkness. The noise of the torrent made conversation difficult; but neither seemed much inclined to indulge in it, both watching with interest for the appearance of the explorers. All was as yet darkness below, for although the sky was perfectly clear and set with innumerable stars, its feeble shine could not penetrate those mighty depths.

"'Tis a grim height," said the jester, after a pause, during which he seemed to be calculating the possibilities of success in the enterprise. "And this were no ill place to be alone with one's enemy; 'tis so easy to slip accidentally. Why look you so stealthily at me, Niccolò? I know thou art my friend."

"Monsignor, I was but considering, that even with all the advantages of suddenness and treachery,

such sports might be dangerous," replied the Florentine. "But Signor Paolo was your friend too; at least you embraced him and called him your brother."

"Why, so he meant to be," replied the jester calmly.

"I see not into the depths of this policy very clearly," continued the Florentine,—“at this time, when it is of so much consequence to your lordship to conciliate the Orsini and their faction, to destroy him on his way to Rome with proposals of peace?”

"I will destroy them all either by force or fraud, fair weapons both against their treachery and rebellion!" returned the jester fiercely. "Were it the sea, I would empty it drop by drop rather than sit down and fold my hands in despair. Moreover, can I prevent men that travel as they deem by stealth, without adequate attendance, from being murdered by banditti? Know you not, that he departed for Rome rather by my father's invitation than by my will? And shall I tamely lose the recompense of all my toils, because an old man grows timorous and full of fantasy?"

"Indeed, if Donna Lucrezia should wed an Orsino, the barons must be restored to their usurpations," returned the ambassador.

"And what were then my dukedom of Romagna! a trumpet sound full of bravery without substance!" said the jester, tossing his false hair impatiently back from his eyes.

"And where were then your kingdom of Italy?" continued the politic Florentine, in a low but very emphatic tone.

“ You jest with me, Niccolò, but fate shall not ! ” replied the motley, with a fierce sparkle of his brilliant eyes, and clutching his delicate hand as if it already held the sceptre. “ I would I could see again that withered old wizard of Padua, half madman as he was, who was wont to assist me when, being a visionary school-boy at Pisa, I studied the magic art while our long-bearded masters imagined I was lost in the dust of Augustine and Bernard ! ”

“ He did show you a vision, methinks, I have heard it said, in a mirror formed of one vast amethyst ? ” inquired Messer Machiavelli in a slightly mocking tone. “ At least so it is vulgarly reported in Italy, and that the skilful greybeard was the devil himself. But now they appear ! Look how their torches light up the waters like a hot stream of hell ! ”

“ Didst thou go thither to school, that thou rememberest it as clearly as Dante, Niccolò ? ” replied the motley. “ Yea, and with as yearning a melancholy as a Swiss clown the green valleys and snow-diademed hills of his land ! But what do the peasants prattle that the wizard showed to me by his felonious art ? ”

“ A skeleton in a royal crown and mantle, offering to your kneeling form his sceptre, ” returned the ambassador.

“ It is false, and I will bake in a furnace him who says so ! ” exclaimed the motley with fierce vivacity. “ It was a shadow wearing the imperial crown and mantle of Charlemagne, as we see his effigies in the chronicle books, offering me his sceptre and sword twisted together in the likeness of a serpent. ”

“Your grace has read the lesson then well!” replied Machiavelli.

“And I know thou thinkest that thy master has learned thee all his tricks, being his favourite pupil, as the ancient boxer taught his,” said the jester, with a peculiar smile. “Yet beware that, like him, he has not reserved one which may foil thee at last. Yet when I have made my crown something more than this fool’s bauble which I wear, Niccolò, my subtle Niccolò—when I am Cæsar indeed, what shalt thou not be to me?”

“Thy Brutus!” replied the Florentine, with a peculiar flashing glance at his companion.

“My Sejanus, thou meanest rather, dear Niccolò,” said the motley, with a smile in which lurked a dark and deep underthought, “but thou art ever ill at comparisons.”

Machiavelli made no reply, beyond raising his furred cap half ironically, as if accepting the office, and reverted his eye to the spectacle below, keeping, however, a sidelong note of his companion’s movements. The great mass of light, now brought to bear, revealed a grandly picturesque and singular scene. Along the bed of the stream, leaping from rock to rock in the rapid waters, appeared the knights and men-at-arms, and the Carthusians with their shaggy beards, all waving their torches, shouting to each other, and peering among the rocks forming the bosom of the gulf which received the torrent in its tempestuous overflow. Under this illumination the waves flew and eddied in wide streams of silver, and

the cascade sparkled in infinite showers of diamonds.

But it seemed that the search led to no result, and the jester laughed aloud, when, gathering into such groups as the rocks permitted, it was even apparent to those above that they were engaged in despairing consultation. But while gazing thus, both the ambassador and his attendant started at a play of crimson light from the mouth of the cave before them. It vanished instantly ; but was evidently noticed by the throng below, for they raised a shout which rang above the confused roar of the torrent.

“ There is murder, surely, in yonder cave, that will out,” said the Florentine with a slight shudder, and an acute glance at his companion.

“ Murder hath no skill at kindling fires, to guide men to his haunts, that ever I heard,” replied the jester, coldly. “ However it be, they must needs retire, and have their labour for their pains.”

“ Yet wherefore are the knights stripping off their armour?—what can be meant?” returned the ambassador. “ See you, the grim English squire is taking his lord’s cuishes, and the canon is wringing his hands ; what has he done with his torch ?”

“ Let it drop in the waves—I saw it go hissing down the current,” replied the motley. “ But where are the hounds?—I do fear their instinct more than these men’s reason.”

“ Now, by St. Julian ! the madmen intend to climb yon slippery precipices !” exclaimed Machiavelli. “ See you, sir?—they take opposite sides

of the cataract . . . well leaped, fool of the sun !—he is a whole rock above his compeer. Hark ! how he laughs and waves his hand in triumph !—San Zanobi, it cannot be so difficult as we imagine hence to climb those rocks !—See how contentiously they keep pace with each other ! All the fiends ! they mount as if they had scaling ladders.”

“ No, no,—ha, ha !—look, yonder fellow slips—slides—the holy knight !—he will be dashed to pieces—well, what is that to thee or me, Niccolò ?—ha, he has caught by yonder drooping water-larch !—he is safe now,” ejaculated the motley, watching the hazardous descent of the Hospitaller, whose feet had slipped among the precipices, and who only saved himself from falling the whole height which he had ascended, by clutching at a dwarf pine which grew out of a cleft in the precipices. As it was, only with extreme difficulty and at imminent hazard of being engulfed beneath the masses of water, did he gradually regain the bed of the river.

“ Where is the English savage now ?” exclaimed the motley, after watching with breathless attention the perilous descent.

“ He is lost in the cloudy foam !—there, there !—see you him not, like a sea-gull in a storm ?” returned Messer Niccolò.

“ Would the other were where he stands !—I like his face the worse of the two,” said the jester. “ And truly he intends to follow, finding that destruction could not meet him on the other side !—but he is not so lithe of limb !—he has slipped three times ! Now, by the fisherman’s keys ! the English madman

stands upon the rock before us — drenched and drowned as a rat; and yet with but a leap to place him in the cavern's mouth, or in the ravine below! By heaven, his glorious courage makes me wish him success, though it be to save one of that detested brood!"

"The rock trembles beneath his feet; he means to leap! — Sir knight! 'tis madness — return!" shouted Messer Niccolò.

"Let us not grieve too much; he will leave inheritors, no doubt," said the jester, relapsing into his usual tone. "But look you—he dares not—he hesitates—he dares not!—nor any man in his senses; the mere weight of the water would beat him down."

It seemed as if those below also perceived the desperate position and design of Le Beaufort. The Carthusians set up a confused miserere; the Hospitaller, the canon, and all the men-at-arms joined in wild shouts to him not to attempt the imminently dangerous leap before him. They saw him wave his hand exultingly, as if he discerned some advantage which they could not below — and he leaped!

The Florentine closed his eyes with a shudder, but opened them at an exclamation from his companion, not of horror but of extreme surprise. The mysterious light again arose, and by its glare the figure of the knight appeared as if within a wall of water formed by the curve which the cataract made in pouring over the upper rocks.

"He will be murdered doubtless the moment he enters; some will be there to do the honours of the

cave, if one may judge by yonder light," said the motley, hurriedly.

The figure of the knight disappeared.

There was another pause of profound and aghast silence, and then the Hospitaller was observed rushing rather than climbing up the rocks, followed by the English soldiers. But the latter, embarrassed with their armour, could make but little progress, although animated by the most resolute desperation at the disappearance of their young leader. Anon the Hospitaller reached the projection from which his brother-in-arms had leaped, which was separated only by a chasm of roaring water from the marble buttress which broke the torrent into its first fall.

"What ails him?—dares he not follow?" said Machiavelli, breathlessly. "And now, look you, he is bending forward as if listening to some one speaking within the cavern!"

"Perchance 'tis the knight yelling for aid!" said he of the motley, leaning forward, as if he too would endeavour to catch the sound. "And now the priest hath got the better of the soldier in him! mark, how like a man pursued by wolves he is hurrying down the precipices as if tempting fate to pitch him headlong into death."

"He has joined them—tells a breathless tale—and see you they are all rushing to the rocks on your side!" said the Florentine, whose companion was seated a little further on the bridge towards the shore opposite to the convent. At this instant the deep bay of bloodhounds discovering a scent was heard.

"What has happened?" exclaimed the motley, hur-

riedly, and gazing intently below. Men-at-arms and monks seemed alike rushing in delirious excitement over the shallow river, and vanishing rapidly one after the other in a dark fissure of the rocks.

“My life on it, they have discovered the saint’s road to his hermitage !” exclaimed Machiavelli.

“Migueloto, if thou hast deceived me !” muttered the jester, springing up like a startled tiger, and leaping with the agility of the same animal over the Florentine, who still lay on the bridge, he hurried down the rocks. Messer Niccolo followed more leisurely, but the jester continued to hasten along, striding with such rapidity that on reaching the shore he nearly overthrew Messer Bembo, who was wringing his wet clothes and distractedly chaunting a hymn of thanksgiving.

“What is discovered ? what hath happed ?” exclaimed the Florentine.

Messer Bembo could merely point to the opposite rocks, and then he laughed hysterically, wiping the tears from his eyes at the same time.

The nimble jester waited not to learn what might be the precise cause of this excitement. He vaulted from stone to stone across the river, and reached a yawning fissure in the rocks up which the glare of light, the distant shouts, and the continued howl of the hounds, convinced him that there was a way discovered. This passage in the rock had probably existed ever since the earthquake which had reft a way for the torrent itself, and ascended in a frightful zig-zag, sometimes completely closed in by a kind of natural arch of huge marble blocks, at others cloven to a

vast height so as to admit a pale streak of light. After winding as it seemed for a great way through the dark entrails of the mountain, the passage terminated in the cavern below the torrent.

A singular spectacle awaited the gaze of the eager jester. The cavern was of great extent, composed of enormous masses of rock tossed together in chaotic confusion, and glittering all over in the blaze of the innumerable torches as if with serpents of coloured light, so singularly brilliant and twisted were the stalactites and petrifications which clustered on it. One rock indeed there was in which a strong effort of the imagination might shape some resemblance to a crucifixion. Fastened to this by an iron rivet, a chain, and a belt round his waist, lay the figure of a man, palpitating and struggling like a fallen horse, while the two knights, the Carthusians, and the men-at-arms, in a delirium of excitement, were endeavouring to break the massive links with blows, with their teeth, with exertions of main strength ! Some embers of dry drift wood still burned near the prisoner, and had probably been the means by which he kindled the flames which had encouraged his deliverers to his aid ; and but just in time, to judge by the cadaverous paleness of his features. The two hounds, which had evidently been beaten from their scent, stood licking their jaws and howling at a distance.

CHAPTER VII.

“ A net in th’ one hand, and a rusty blade
In th’ other was; this Mischiefe, that Mishap ;
With th’ one his foes he threatened to invade,
With th’ other he his friends meant to enwrap,
For whom he could not kill he practised to entrap.”

SPENSER.

MESSER Niccolò followed in the steps of his companion at a more leisurely and careful pace ; but such was the strength of the chain which bound the unlucky Orsino to its rock, that the rescuers had not succeeded in severing its links when he too arrived. It was of the kind used in fastening up in their stalls the mighty animals intended for the bull fights—a pastime which the Spaniards had introduced with themselves into Italy.

The Florentine took a leisurely survey of the whole scene, and of the person of the prisoner, which indeed was not unworthy of notice, for it presented many of the finer characteristics of the Italian race, deteriorated indeed from the manliness and vigour of the Latin, but retaining much of the symmetry and grace befitting the boasted descendants of Venus. The Orsino was a man in the prime of his age, and possessed a frame rather remarkable for elegance and pro-

portion than for power, yet which was probably of much greater strength than might at first have been concluded, from the perfect harmony and adjustment of the parts. The features were strongly, but at the same time finely delineated, traces of ardent passions visible in their rapid workings, and ever-restless variety of light and shade; which yet, at pleasure, could sink into a marble repose, that mocked the scrutiny of the observer. The complexion, too, might be compared to that which marble takes when long exposed to the rays of a southern sun, that golden paleness of hue which we rarely or never behold in the north, now deepened to swarthiness by the dark sweat which bathed the visage of the exhausted captive. His long raven-blue hair heightened the cadaverous tint which suffering and dread had bestowed, and over which his sunken eyes, flashing with delirious excitement, diffused a strange light. His whole frame was indeed in agitation, the muscles throbbing, the palpitations of the heart visible through the mantle of flock cloth which he wore, his general costume being that of a Lombard merchant, which he had probably assumed as a disguise for his real quality. Surcharged with the electric fluid of the passions as was the nature of the Italian of the sixteenth century, still he had nothing of the mercurial vivacity of the Frenchman in him. His vehemence vented itself in thunder storms occasionally, but for the most part smouldered under a calm aspect, differing equally from the pompous gravity of the Spaniard, and which was not melancholy, and yet resembled it as twilight resembles moonlight. It was in this age

that the Italians achieved that character throughout Europe which induced Shakspeare to make Italy the scene of some of his most vigorous and terrible creations, for there the passions of humanity seemed to have reached their hottest glow; the human intellect to have attained its subtlest polish—there the sun-struck passion of Romeo, and the refined fiendishness of Iago, were natural productions of an atmosphere so fraught with good and evil, with horror and beauty, treachery and cruelty so remorseless, love so absorbing as to resemble madness, and which only the delirious splendour of the imagination of that age, excited by the strange convulsions and revolutions which befell it, could have reflected into such terrible and yet magnificent distortions.

So much were the actors in the scene absorbed, that no one noticed the entrance even of so dignified a personage as the Florentine ambassador, except the jester, who had himself halted under the black natural archway which the piled rocks formed opening into the cavern.

“They have saved him indeed, the deadliest snake of the whole brood!” muttered the jester, half to himself, half to Messer Niccolò. “I will attempt no enterprize again on this day of the moon, for on it the blindest chance has foiled all wisdom and foresight! Yet stay! look how his tongue has swollen too big for his jaws—water would refresh him. Methinks I will bear him some; ’twere a charity.”

“And lest the cold wave should chill, you will season it with some eastern powder, which warms the stomach suddenly?” returned Messer Niccolò,

with an inquiring glance; adding, in a somewhat deprecativè tone, "But I see not any good policy in that—it is one of my maxims, that a prince who intends to crush his enemies, should not attempt to do it in many blows, but in one which shall concentrate the strength of many, for else he runs much risk of exciting a resistance which may baffle him. Never injure but where you destroy, or you but sow the dragon's teeth for your own destruction; therefore, until you can extirpate the whole Orsini family, I would not have you provoke them by the destruction of one of its greatest members, in whom its life-blood flows—its heir—for you can scarcely hope so sudden a catastrophe should hap without suspicion."

"It is another of your maxims, Niccolò, that whoever would keep a newly-acquired state, must root out the whole race of the expelled prince," replied the motley, musingly. "My power is only that of which I have deprived the feudatories of the Holy See."

"Without doubt, you are the destined instrument to exterminate the petty tyrants of Italy, and once more to restore her unity," replied the politician. "It is also true that Paolo Orsino is one of the most powerful—nay, since the Colonnas were stripped naked—the most powerful of the church's rebels; still, I do not think the time is seasonable at this moment for his destruction."

"Niccolò, thou hast a better brain to devise, than heart to execute," replied the jester, somewhat contemptuously smiling. "But thou art ever mine oracle; and moreover, there is something whispers

me that, like all the other mischances of my life, even this is working to my good. I may yet need Paolo to play against the proud coxcomb of Ferrara. What doth this Bembo with his sharp nose cutting the air of Umbria?"

"I would I could assure myself on that thesis, sir," returned the politician.

"I will not give the Orsino to drink then—now; moreover, I must learn who hath betrayed me thus by suffering him to live to need a draught at my hands, or the tickling in his ribs of a sprinkle of mercy!" continued the motley. "But I much doubt whether Signor Paolo, who has cause to know me, who has met me in battle, where men's looks strike into each other's souls, may not recognise me even in this disguise. Anon, and I shall find it as difficult to hide me as the sun, were he to play at bo-peep with the world."

"Nay, sir; in this disguise, with those fiery red locks, that bepatched visage, those strange eyes, who could recognise the great duke of Romagna? And considering how little some do love you, who could suspect such folly in the subtlest spirit of the age, as to believe he would trust himself to its protection?" said Messer Niccolò.

"Nay, good lad, not altogether; these fellows of mine will not turn their backs on double their number," replied the jester, rather hastily, as if he liked not the covert sneer. But, at this moment, a shout of joy interrupted the dialogue. One of the massive links of the chain had yielded to a prodigious blow which Sir Reginald struck it with a sharp fragment

of rock, and the prisoner sprang up, at liberty. His next movement was to throw himself on his knees before the crucifixion, and solemnly to vow the erection of a chapel to Saint Guidobald, as near as possible to the scene of his miraculous deliverance. Then, rising, he embraced his deliverers in turn, with the most vehement protestations of eternal gratitude.

“My castles, lands, revenues, my heart and soul, and those of my whole race, are at your devotion, noblest knights!” he exclaimed. “The life which you have preserved is yours, and there is nothing I call mine, excepting the love I bear my beautiful mistress, which I would not gladly part withal to lighten me of the vast burden of gratitude which will else overwhelm my soul.”

“We shall not ask you to surrender that sole reservation among your treasures, my lord, more especially as it seems only a talisman of mishaps,” replied the Hospitaller, with a sarcastic smile. “But your thanks are more truly owed to the compassionate Dominican monk who guided us hither, than to us, to whom it was merely an exercise and a sport.”

“A Dominican!” exclaimed the young baron, with an appearance of much surprise. “Surely, then, ’tis my guardian angel, sent in that disguise by my sweet patroness, Our Lady of the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, to whom I also vow threescore torches of Turkish ambergris at Candlemas.”

“Of Santa Maria Maggiore!” muttered the jester. “Ay, forsooth, because Our Lady’s portrait there so nearly resembles his beautiful mistress.”

“It had like, for I do hear that incomparable piece of Leonardo’s was painted from your beauteous mother, Madame Vanozza,” said Messer Niccolò, in a whisper to his companion, whose whole frame vibrated as if struck with some jarring association.

“Do you notice,—did you ever notice, my best Niccolò, how little I resemble either the Virgin of Santa Maria Maggiore, my mother, or the Vicar of Christ, my father?” he said, in an eager and hurried tone. “Well! I have heard it often whispered, (I am half convinced of the truth of it myself,) that I was exchanged at nurse; for, after all, the pope fears much more than he loves me, and I never had much brotherly affection for my kin, nor they for me, by Saint Peter’s rock! and his holiness as good as disowned me when he made me a cardinal. I think some day to question the hag who nursed me; ay, and if need be, in a way that shall force the truth out, if it be anywhere in her withered old carcass!”

He spoke with a singular vehemence, and even fury, as if stirred with the remembrance of this imaginary wrong. Messer Niccolò looked at him with a keen and penetrating gaze; but he replied, as if not laying much stress on what was said, “Methinks it were no stroke of policy on your part, my lord, to prove this rumour fact, if rumour it be.”

“You are mistaken, Niccolò.—Niccolò, for once you are mistaken!” returned the jester, in a lower, but still excited key. “By heaven! I would rather be acknowledged, at this moment, the lawful heir of my old foster-father Schiavone’s poverty, than remain the monstrous bastard of a priest!”

“Is it possible?” exclaimed Machiavelli, gazing incredulously at the speaker, and subjoining in thought, “Can remorse or shame, in reality, enter this fiendish bosom?” But an idea, suggested by the dreadful reports afloat in Italy, occurred to him, and he continued, with a subtle smile, “But you will not tempt or force your old foster-mother to tell the truth until you are established in Italy as yourself, and not as a Borgia, monsignor?”

“Oh, thou brother of my soul! our thoughts are ever twins,” replied the jester, in a tone of some displeasure, as if vexed that he had so far revealed his secret mind. “Therefore I can hide nothing from thee, were I even willing. But, come, let us keep the start of the mob, for I see they mean to lead their precious prize once more into the free air.”

After the first enthusiastic outburst of joy and feeling, the Orsino had, it appeared, become again exhausted, and was now supported staggeringly towards the exit by some of his numerous deliverers. The ambassador and his companion immediately hastened on before, unwilling to mingle in the confusion of the returning multitude.

As they approached the end of the fissure on the river, the voice of the canon was audible, calling in an excited tone, but not venturing to explore what had happened in *propria personâ*. The jester amused himself with answering in a variety of ghostly and discordant cries, which were multiplied and made hoarse by the echoes of the rocks; the due effect of which appeared, when, emerging on the river, they found that the canon had disappeared.

“Methought he dared not encounter the substance of those sounds!—few priests dare, even of those which themselves make,” said the jester, laughing sardonically. “But I can in nowise fathom this matter of the Dominican. It was my father himself who invited the Orsino to Rome, hard against my will, until I bethought me of the dangers that beset travellers in these times, and that with Paolo’s the brains of the confederacy were knocked out. But how could his sanctity have such certain notice of my designs?”

“You are not, then, my lord, of Signor Paolo’s opinion, that heaven itself took so strong an interest in his affairs as to send one of the blessed to his deliverance?” said Machiavelli.

“If the heavens troubled themselves much about what is done on earth, methinks the world’s business would be nigh bankruptcy,” returned the jester. “But I deem, if all the saints in heaven were as contentious after an errand as the porters at St. John Lateran’s gate, there is ne’er a prince nor lord in Italy, at this present naming, who is not too affectionately and zealously served by the devil to need their aid.”

“Then, perchance, my Lord Paolo’s good devil hath stood his friend on this occasion,” said the Florentine, gravely. “Mayhap he prayed so earnestly in his tribulation, that it was thought expedient to leave him to be plucked in a time of less grace than this of the jubilee, when heaven showers indulgences with both hands as liberally as girls throw the yellow asphodels at one another in the Campagna, in April.”

“What if it be rather the work of my bad devil,—

for I have one, that thwarts and ravel's all my plans!" exclaimed the motley, with passionate and sudden vehemence.

"Do I live to hear my Cæsar say that of a man above ground?" said Messer Niccolò, with great curiosity.

"No, Niccolò, thou dost not—thou dost not!" returned the motley, hurriedly; and Machiavelli remarked that his features became of an unearthly purple paleness.

"My lord, you would not say, that—" began the Florentine, when his companion interrupted him—

"Thou dost not believe in ghosts, Niccolò, dost thou—at all?" he said in a calmer tone, "whether in the flesh, or out of it; or else thou dost oft jest daringly! But wouldst thou disbelieve in thine own eyes?"

"There is nought that I do less believe in; the cores of things, and not the rinds for me, my lord," replied the politician. "Had I believed mine eyes, I should have written word to my serene lords that your grace was making a brother of the Medici's nephew, this Orsino, and that consequently they should keep our drawbridges up in Florence as expecting an enemy."

"The confederates strain at nothing else; neither of us can trust the other; so that for either party to keep his forces we can only unite against some third;—but thou hast my word for it—the Venetians shall feel the earthquake first, if I am he who loosens it," said the jester. "But what saidst thou concerning the rinds of things? Is it not Lucretius who fancies

spirits represent the forms of their once bodies as the flimsy onion peel its substance when stripped from it? But, being so, a ghost should preserve the exact appearance in which its carcass disappeared! They are not like players, that can shift their garbs at pleasure behind the black curtain, ha? What say you?"

"Pray you, my lord, explain yourself more clearly to a dull apprehension," returned Messer Niccolò, with an eye, however, which in its piercing earnestness gave no evidence of intellectual hebetude.

"I would say, for example," observed the motley, in a tone of dark rumination, "I speak as the thought flashes over my mind—that if my sometime brother, the Duke of Gandia, for instance, would obligingly gratify my father, who whines so often over the fate of his firstborn, that was forsooth so beautiful and good that people blessed him as he went along merely for his fair looks, and all the women doated on him!—I say, if Francesco's ghost should take a fancy to present itself some night to—to Alexander VI., what form and what garb deem you he were likely to appear in?"

"To his father?" replied Ser Machiavelli, without daring to trust his eyes to meet the fiery gaze which he felt was fixed upon him. "Oh, fathers are a strange people! Certainly not with all those dagger-wounds upon him, and the slime of the Tiber streaming from his long golden curls, which I have heard his holiness fondly call his rays. But, if it consulted the parental taste, most likely it would appear as the blooming young Antinous he seemed among all the youth of Rome that day he was made gonfalonier of

the church, when he wore the white velvet habit trimmed with rubies, and rode the snowy charger bit with silver and pearls."

"I will shoe my horses with silver, but the Romans shall forget that pageantry!" returned the motley, vehemently. "But, for myself, I shall not very soon; for I remember, when I rode behind him on my silly mule, perked up in my violet cardinal robes, his horse bespattered me all over with mud, as he reined it suddenly up to salute his sister, Donna Lucrezia!—for I can scarce call her mine. I was in such a passion that I nigh choked in silence! I thought it was done with the purpose to affront me; for you should have heard how the rabble laughed."

"I did hear; for they laughed so loud that we heard it at Florence," returned Messer Niccolò playfully. "Then, when we took it up, the laugh went on to Mantua, and so to the king of France's court at Milan, —where they laughed too, no doubt, for they hated you then."

"They hate me now! but I care not who hates, provided men serve my purposes; nay, it pleases me to see my haters fawn upon me. What is power, but to sway men against their wills?" replied the jester; and reverting to the strange topic which he had himself chosen, as if it amused him, he continued,—“Let us say, then, that Francesco would put on his state-robes to visit his august sire; he would surely shift them to visit his murderer?”

"I should conjecture he would appear with the very look, garb, and gesture with which he died beneath the monster's blows!" returned Machiavelli, kindling

out of his habitual tone of cynical indifference. "His countenance convulsed with horror, pain, and desperate entreaty; his nine wounds panting out the crimson blood of his youth, like young vipers gasping for food; his fair hair drenched and bedabbled; his beautiful face drained of its lovely colours, and whitening into stone! yea, with the very aspect of the sinless Abel, bleeding on his odoriferous sacrifice!"

"Lamented over by his wife—and sister, ha!" exclaimed the jester, with a wild and scornful laugh. "Well, Abel merited his fate, though not perchance at the hands of Cain, if divines now-a-days are right—but my poor brother! Alas, what had he done to anger any one, whose fiery temper was yet as manageable and full of all comely sweetnesses, as the high-blooded steed of Arabia, so docile to the rein, so furious to the spur!"

"He was, indeed, a most excellent and well-conditioned youth; as promisingly laden with fair qualities as an almond-tree with blossoms," returned Ser Machiavelli. "Peace to his soul, if he had one! He has been long enough in purgatory to burn out that worst offence he had—a too lavish affection for that which Plato did *not* call the beautiful."

"But when we consider, too, that from his offence sprung his chastisement!" said the jester, with hypocritical suavity. "Some jealous husband, or revengeful lover, no doubt met him that fatal fourteenth of June."

"Or maddened father, or irritated brother!" said Machiavelli. "They told us in Florence that at the great feast which your mother gave to you on that

day,—the next, and your grace (then cardinal) was to depart for Naples, to crown King Don Federigo,—a masked stranger frequently applied to see the duke, and at length had access, and delivered him a perfumed letter at table. Whereupon he soon after pleaded some indisposition, and withdrew; and your grace (having preparations to make for your journey) went with him.”

“We parted on the steps of the Palazzo Sforza; ’tis all true enough,” said the jester, calmly. “And he, in his merry way, would needs have me give him absolution, (being a priest,) for that he was wending to see the fairest lady in all the patrimony of St. Peter! I, as laughingly, alack! told him he must first do penance; and away went he, waving his hand, and singing in his gaiety, as it were in triumph. Perchance he meant, too, to have wished my sister Lucrezia good night, for he went towards the convent where she was staying until the divorce was pronounced which severed her from the Lord of Pesaro.”

“And your grace never saw him again?” said Machiavelli, suddenly.

“Surely!—when we drew his corpse all streaming from the river, near Castel Santangelo, and also when we buried him in state, in his armour and gauds as gonfalonier,” replied the jester. “I was obliged to ordain all, for his father took no notice of anything, but bolted himself in his chamber, and starved for three days; and would have starved himself to death but for Lucrezia’s prayers and tears, and getting very hungry. And oh, what vows of reformation

did he make ! but his holiness is like Vesuvius, ever either raging with fire, or silent in snow."

"Ay, it is so, my lord, but surely you are the Titan whose throes within cause the mountain to heave," said Ser Machiavelli ; "yet continuing our confabulation of the secrets of Orcus, in what guise does your lordship imagine the spirit of your noble brother *would appear to his murderer ?*"

"As a black shadow, without voice, visage, colour, or form," replied the jester, turning with so strange an expression to Messer Niccolò, that, but that he was a perfect diplomatist, he must have started. "Yet, lacking all these means of enforcing recognition, still would he be recognized ! The murderer of the pope's darling can be no coward ; he might not fear this presence ; still would it irk him more than the direfullest form, shake his soul with its silence more than by the most terrible imprecations ; until he shall defy, madden, rave, rush at it sword in hand, and wake and laugh, and gnash his teeth, and know that it is only a darkness, and yet that it is there, and will not away throughout time or eternity !"

"I marvel not you solace your vain revenge with such fearful hopes," said the Florentine ; "since the murderers have so long eluded all search that 'tis past expectation they should ever be discovered, on earth at least. Alas ! what feelings must be yours, my lord ; you that were his brother, that played with him in childhood, that spent your flourishing youth together engaged in all manly exercises and joyous sports, budding and branching like two fair cypresses planted by the same hand in the same hour."

"No; but like two acorns, one of which by the mere accident of the sun shoots up and dwarfs his brother," returned the jester, bitterly. "But let all that pass. I must find the bottom of this strange matter of the Dominican. Migueloto dared not have thus trifled with my orders. Have I not heard thee say, Niccolò, that my lieutenant, Don Remiro, has received some kind of obligation from the sacred chamber lately without my connivance?"

"His holiness admired the rigidity of his justice so much, that he gave him a general indulgence for all the cruelties he has committed in his office," said Ser Machiavelli. "Moreover, his wife is some kindred to the Colonnas."

"How came I ever to forget that?" observed the jester, musingly.

"Nay, my lord, you needed a man of a nature so relentless in right as Don Remiro's," said the Florentine. "And has he not justified your confidence by routing out nearly all the robber-holes in Romagna, so that the peasants even sow corn as far as Spoleto?"

"And what is more, they reap it," said the motley. "When I made Don Remiro podestà, I told him that I would not have a rogue left in all Italy, if I could prevent it, but myself. Yet they tell me, he is as little loved as the fierce iron with which we have our wounds seared up; and if he has stood in the way of my will in this matter, I know the people would clap hands to see him come out on one of his own streaming scaffolds."

"Then, I approve the sending of him forth," said the ambassador, jocosely. "No man has a right to

govern another, even to his advantage, against his will. But where in the name of marvels have we wandered?"

"Whither I have been leading all along, for I never forget business in pleasure, Niccolò," replied the jester. "I would have you send me my mute, Zeid, and this gigantic pine is a landmark by which you may guide him to my bidding-place."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BLACK PENITENT.

"I have heard how desperate wretches, like myself,
Have wandered out at this dead time of night,
And met the foe of mankind in his walks."

OTWAY.

"NAY, my lord, you will surely feel very melancholy to be left alone in this dismal gorge, especially after our ghostly conversation," said the Florentine, looking up the mountainous valley towards the torrent which they had left at some distance in the rear.

"'Tis very sad indeed to think of it; but the Duke of Gandia is better in heaven, and we have more room on earth," said the jester, mockingly. "Hasten, my good Niccolò, and send this fellow to me, but let them not note his coming; and let him bring my hounds with him."

"They are here, my lord," said Ser Machiavelli, pointing to the dogs, which, with dejected steps and drooping heads, had hitherto followed their master in silence.

"Poor things! they are not accustomed to be so cheated of their rewards," said the jester, compassionately patting the heads of the savage brutes.

“ But there is no time to be lost, Machiavelli ; I will sit and watch the bear in the skies until I have given Zeid his orders, and then rejoin the bear in the convent.”

“ But again, my lord, I would have you think well ere you devise aught against this gentleman,” said Messer Niccolò, slightly shivering, and then wrapping his cloak around him as if it were the night air which chilled his blood.

“ Rest content ; I mean only to dispatch Zeid on a message,” returned the motley, impatiently ; and observing that he was chafed and out of temper, the Florentine bowed respectfully and withdrew. Retracing his steps with some trouble up the steep paths which led to the monastery, he could not refrain from pausing once on a projecting precipice whence he could easily distinguish the pine tree at whose root Cæsar Borgia had seated himself.

“ Tyrant, murderer, fratricide !” he could not forbear from exclaiming aloud, as if to give the suppressed feelings of his soul vent. “ But also destroyer of tyrants ! be a king, that thou mayst make all form of royalty detestable, as thy sire is a priest, to make all forms of superstition terrible. Cement the shattered provinces of Italy in an ocean of blood, if it must be, but once more together. Live to make Italy *one*, thou shalt die to make it *free* !”

And, clutching the hilt of his dagger with a kind of convulsive gesture which was not unusual with him, the Italian republican of the sixteenth century strode on his way.

Before reaching the gate of the monastery, how-

ever, the personage of whom he was in search luckily presented himself. Excepting the ambassador himself, no one in the train beside this being knew the real rank of the jester; and there was no great stretch of confidence in his knowing it, for besides being an African Moor, and therefore scarcely at all acquainted with the language of Italy, he was one of the miserable victims of oriental cruelty and jealousy, and had formerly been a mute in a Turkish seraglio, his tongue being slit in a manner which rendered any attempt which he might make to speak an inarticulate babble. But discretion was a quality which the Borgia esteemed in his instruments, and this enforced silence made him acceptable to his European master, who raised him gradually to a post which obtained him in Rome the title of *Il Strozzacatore*, or the Strangler; but which in Cæsar's household ranked him as first runner to his grace. For the former office, although never ostensibly employed, and having apparently no instrument to perform his operations with ever about him, extraordinary stories were afloat as to his capabilities; for the latter, which answers in some respect to a modern king's messenger, except that the Moor always travelled on foot, and in straight lines, swimming rivers and crossing mountain and valley with equal facility, still more singular legends were believed as to his qualifications. Among others, it was said that he had frequently hunted the stag on foot, and had never failed to run down his prey without assistance either of hound or arrow.

The Strangler's appearance was such as might

gratify expectation, considering him under either point of view. If a leopard stood upright on its hind legs, with its paws abjectly dropped in front, it would have been the figure of the Strangler, and its huge, round, bestial, hairy visage, black and brindled, with the same wild-beast expression of eye, would have daguerreotyped his countenance. In fact, he had little more than a rough resemblance to the general attributes of humanity, and one or two shades of its feelings; among which the most abject respect and obedience to his terrible master might perhaps be reckoned.

The few simple words which the Moor understood, enabled him to comprehend Machiavelli's order, and he hastened down the ravine with such rapidity that the Florentine almost imagined that he had doubled himself up, and rolled down like a dry bush of furze. Crossing himself, notwithstanding all his scepticism, he gladly continued his route through the convent gates.

The Strangler, by whatever means he reached a footing in the ravine, speedily made his way to the appointed spot, indicated by a lofty pine, which was entirely bare to its summit, where it was singularly tufted. He found his lord with folded arms walking restlessly up and down, on a strip of green turf beneath it.

"Zeid, thou art weary; my good dog, I now wish I had not diverted myself with seeing thee chase the hare in the snow-hills above," he said, in a mild and somewhat cajoling manner. "But I know thou lovest me! Did I not beg off thy life, when Sultan

Zem slashed thee once in the neck, and had raised his scimitar for a second blow?"

The slave acquiesced with a slight snort, like that of a horse when it perceives danger.

"Then thou must be in Ronciglione to-night, wert thou twice as spent," continued Cæsar, changing his tone to one of command. "In the castle there thou wilt find the podestà of Romagna, Don Remiro d'Orco, awaiting my arrival. Take this ring as thy credential, and bid him on the very instant despatch Don Migueloto, with all the Spanish men-at-arms not necessary to keep the walls, to meet me as near as may be to this place to-morrow morning."

Zeid knelt, took the ring, and placed it on his head in token of obedience.

"Follow the course of the river to Narni; thou knowest the track thence," continued Cæsar; and the runner made a spring as if to dart forward on his journey, when his lord with a rapid clutch detained him.

"Delay not on thy journey so long as a hunted stag to lap in a stream," he said; and pointing to the moon, which shone serenely above, he continued—"In an hour yonder light will sink behind the hills; and when its last rim has disappeared I shall loosen my hounds on your traces, so if you pause to sleep, you know by whom you will be overtaken."

The Moor again bowed reverentially, as if the supervision indicated was a very proper and usual one, shot away like an arrow from the bow, and was almost instantly out of sight.

As it seemed with the intention of faithfully keep-

ing his promise, Cæsar remained on the spot which he had selected for the interview, pausing for some time in deep thought, and then resuming his restless pacing up and down, without noticing that the two hounds never failed to follow him, however short the trip and sudden the turn. And yet it was a scene and a night which might have diffused its calm even over that perturbed and terrible mind. The mountains towered around in a kind of transparent darkness, so bright were the Heavens above, and so soft the shadows which the moonlight threw among their rugged sides and aerial pinnacles. The distant roar of the cataract rather harmonized with than disturbed the blessed silence; even the turbulent river was there calm and undertoned, as if it feared to disturb the sleep of the mountains and forests around.

But Cæsar's step rather increased in fretful rapidity, and his eyes shone with more impatient sparkles, as he occasionally glanced up at the moon. At last he became weary of this exercise, and leaning his back against the pine, with his face to the fair planet, he seemed to watch it as if its gaze could follow or hasten its imperceptible movement over the sky. Sylla and Marius seated themselves on each side of their master, and appeared as if engaged in the same occupation, for certainly their red glistening eyes were fixed on the ball of light above.

While apparently the hounds and their lord were absorbed in this survey, the two former uttered a low whine, stretched their noses to the wind, and began to tremble in a very strange and unusual manner. Cæsar, after a glance at the dogs, looked in the

direction whence it was evident they apprehended some approach, expecting to behold either a wolf or wild boar, or some other of the savage denizens; yet, for some moments, even his vulture gaze could discern no object. But suddenly a black form about the height and breadth of a man, but with no distinct outline of one, appeared on the bank of the river, at some distance, looking towards the cataract.

Cæsar's visage grew for a moment stonily pale and fixed, and he clutched at the pine to support his tottering limbs; but the next instant, either his self-possession returned, or his terror took the form of defiance. He sprang forward several steps, and although he paused irresolutely, he shouted in an unwavering tone, "Speak! who goes there?—Friend or foe to the Duke of Romagna?"

"Hillo, echoes! hillo, ladies! play me none of your cheats to-night!" a voice was heard gibbering in reply; the mere sound of which restored Cæsar to himself. He continued to watch, but no longer with any alarm, the gradual approach of the dark traveller, who came along with singular slowness, as if he were a very aged man, and talking to himself all the way. But the fears of the hounds did not diminish; they crouched on the grass, and continued their low tremulous whine. The stranger approached without apparently noticing any of the group, and in any other age and country might indeed have been pronounced a terrific object. He seemed to be a very old man, for his figure was much bowed, and his gait feeble, supporting himself with difficulty on

a staff; but his face and form were completely covered with a black mantle tied round the waist, and perforated with holes at which the eyes looked out, but which was else all of a piece. This was the garb of a Black Penitent, which was only enjoined to be worn on a pilgrimage by criminals of the greatest atrocity.

“ Good even, father ! whither wend you so late by night, and so lonely ? ” said the motley, in a cheerful tone, as if relieved from some secret apprehension.

“ Lonely !—when the owl and the wolf hoot and howl at every turning,” replied the Penitent with a wild laugh.

“ Have I not heard that voice before ? ” said Cæsar, musingly. “ Why, thou art come as if a wish could summon thee ! Art thou not mine ancient master in the great art, Dom Sabbat, of Padua, who put fine thoughts in my head by showing me my fortune in a mirror of magic stone, and who, when the Inquisition sought thy acquaintance, left books and chambers in a blaze, and disappeared like the flame on pools where murdered men lie rotting ? ”

“ Or like yonder tongues of fire on the hill-side ? ” returned the Penitent, extending an arm of singular length, terminated by a hand so fibrous, lean, and withered, that it resembled the branch of a fir-tree in winter, and pointing to the brow of a distant mountain which presented a brilliant phenomenon not unusual in those volcanic regions. The craggy side of the mountain seemed as if set at intervals

with blazing torches thrust from the earth by demon hands, which appeared and disappeared in fantastic evolutions.

“But thou art he?” said Cæsar, after gazing with an instant’s careless attention at the spectacle.

“I have been so for a long time,” replied the Penitent, with a dark chuckling laugh.

“Yes, thou art old, and very old; and thou needest some comfort in these thy worn-out times,” replied Cæsar, cajolingly. “I am not so poor and powerless to do my friends good turns as I was when we studied the cabala at Pisa together—and I love to encourage the sciences—therefore, my good Sabbat, if thou wilt come and sojourn with me, thou shalt have a tower in Santangelo, and practise thy forbidden art so nigh to the Inquisition, that thou canst spit at it from thy windows; and thou and I will make brazen heads that chatter, and devise antidotes, and study the plants that poison so prettily that ’tis a pleasure to die by them, and such like toys, which thou wert wont to love in the old time when I was thy so reverent and faithful pupil.”

“Truly, your grace is no longer a younger brother,” replied the Penitent, inclining himself forward as if to do homage to the accession of dignity in his pupil, but with a degree of mockery, “and I thank you for your noble offer; but it behoves men who have lived for fifteen hundred and odd years to think of dying;—and so they have compelled me to abjure the dark science, and have sent me to Rome to save my soul this jubilee time!”

“Fifteen hundred years!—thou jestest, or art

mad, Dom Sabbat!" exclaimed the Borgia, somewhat startled.

"Oh, you know not how long Heaven can hate!" returned the Penitent with wild vehemence. "'Tis many a thousand years since the great bonfire was kindled; and he who spat in the face of the Son of God when he bore the cross up Calvary still wanders alone through all time!"

"Yet come with me; I know thou hast many noble secrets which the church herself permits us to learn," said Cæsar, soothingly. "Have I not seen thee raise the dead in the person of that imperial phantom who offered me his sceptre?"

"What would it pleasure thee or profit thee to trouble him again—besides shaking the towers of Aix-la-Chapelle, which are already so old and tottering, to raise him?" returned the Penitent.

"But if thou canst raise the dead, canst thou not also lay them?—Canst thou not bid them back to their tranquillity?—why should they blot sunshine with their dark presence?" exclaimed Cæsar, with an impatient and fierce glitter of the eye, and knitting his hand convulsively.

"That is the church's office—to exorcise, not mine!" returned the Black Penitent.

"Tut, tut, I have been a cardinal, and I know what priests can do," said Cæsar.

"And stand the dead too in thy light?" returned the Penitent, his strange eyes flaring through their holes like flame, if flame could glow with meaning, with diabolical, sarcastic, and at the same time insane thought.

“Thou art deft at guessing riddles,” said Cæsar, calmly. “It is not that I fear him—IT!—but it wearies me when so oft in the midst of banquets and splendid feasts, I raise mine eyes and behold it standing before me. But do not deem I fear it—I despised him living—I despise him dead!—I tell thee, Dom Sabbat, when I first beheld it, at the instant when, as legate of the holy see, I put the crown on the head of King Don Federigo in Naples,—I did not even start.”

“You speak some feverish fancy, my son; the strongest of your recollections haunts you, which only a stronger can efface,” replied the Penitent, with a short discordant laugh. “But you forget, boy, to slip the hounds, and the moon is far behind Monte Somma.”

“Heard you my threat to Zeid?” said Cæsar, with a slight shudder. “But I never threaten in vain, or I should be no better served than my hot sire himself; so, whoop, hounds—after him, after him!”

He stirred the hounds with his foot, which still lay couching and panting on the grass, as if the presence of the stranger infused terror even into their savage natures. They whined, but would not move.

“There is surely a spell about me—but I am going,” observed the Penitent, with his dark inward laugh.

“It is late; rest with me to-night in the Carthusian monastery above,” said Cæsar eagerly; but the Penitent shook his head.

“I am forbidden to rest under any roof—out of Rome—much more to profane consecrated stone and

mortar with my presence," he said, in a derisive and yet profoundly gloomy tone.

"Then I will spend the night in converse with thee under this mightiest roof above!" replied Cæsar.

"Nay, for I may not pause, and thou art needed with the company. Dost thou not feel thy cheek sear, for they are talking of thee?" said the Penitent, taking his staff as if to resume his journey.

"But promise me at least that thou wilt visit me in Rome," said Cæsar, very eagerly. "Thou hast but to present thyself at Santangelo, with a token from me to Donna Fiamma, who honours science equally, and she will see thee lodged and attended more zealously than ever Merlin in King Arthur's court."

"Give me thy token; I have heard of the lady, and of her nourishing love for the art," replied the sage, after a moment's pause.

"I must give thee then my poison-emerald, which reddens when my drink is dangerous; for I have sent my signet on another errand," said Cæsar, slowly and somewhat reluctantly taking a small leaden box, about the shape and size of dice, from a hollow in the stick of his fool's bauble, which, nevertheless, he handed over to the Penitent. "And when we meet again, Dom Sabbat, as thou canst no longer fear I should betray thee, either for lack of faith or wit, let me at last see thy face, which thou keepest ever so strangely masked and muzzled."

"Trust none, fear none," replied the Penitent, gloomily. "But hark! they are calling thee, or what voices are those which make the rocks ring?"

"Farewell, then, till we meet in Santangelo," said

Cæsar; and he stepped forward to offer his hand in parting. But the stranger contented himself with a fantastic salute, by waving his withered hands in the air at an extraordinary height, and hastening forward, almost instantly disappeared behind some projecting rocks.

Indistinct voices were now audible in the distance, calling "Zany, Zany," as if the ambassador had taken alarm at the long absence of his jester. The hounds sprang up with their wonted alacrity the moment the adept in the unholy science had disappeared; and remarking it, Cæsar endeavoured, but in vain, to get the dogs to follow even the shortest distance on his trace. They howled fearfully, but would not stir, until he took them back to the pine tree where the Strangler had left him, whose scent they took eagerly, and followed with emulous swiftness. After listening till the light patter of their delicate feet was inaudible in distance, even to the fine organs of the Borgia, he turned and retraced his way to the Carthusian monastery.

CHAPTER IX.

"O Voi ch' avete gli intelletti sani,
Mirate la dottrina che s'asconde
Sotto 'l vellame degli versi strani."—DANTE.

"O ye of subtle intellect, mark the doctrine hidden under
the veil of these strange words."

RETURNING up the rocks, and imitating as he went very accurately the cries of a screech-owl, the jester guided Messer Niccolò, and two or three soldiers who were in search of him with torches, until they met. The Florentine affected to rate his fool severely for the trouble his lingering had occasioned; to which he replied, that he had been trying to get the great gold crown which hung in the sky, and whistled vacantly, until the soldiers, who turned back at a signal from Messer Niccolò, were at a distance.

"It is possible, after all, my lord, that the Dominican was sent by your father; for I hear that he met and warned Signor Paolo to turn back long ere he fell into his danger," said the Florentine.

"How should that be?—Banditti were not likely to make a confidant of our holy father," returned the jester, drily. "But in truth, I know not what to think of the matter. My sister's confessor is a Dominican."

"The famous father, Bruno Lanfranchi, the disciple of Savonarola?" replied Ser Machiavelli. "But wherefore should your sister——"

"Ay, the insolent monk, whose revilings should long since have obtained for him the justice of having his tongue plucked out by the root, but for Lucrezia's folly!" replied the motley, fiercely. "They control me in all things now—but my time will come."

As he spoke they entered the monastery, and made their way to the great hall, in which they found the Orsino and his rescuers engaged in discussing the recent event, and such viands as the austere rules of the order permitted them to furnish. In addition, the canon had found in some part of his baggage several skins of excellent wine, some draughts of which had evidently much revived the late prisoner.

"I was saying, Messer Niccolò," he observed, as the ambassador took his seat, while the fool threw himself carelessly into his old place on the straw heaped round the fire, "that I do grievously mis-doubt—that I know not by what means the banditti could have learned my intentions to cross the mountains with the slight escort whom they murdered when they captured me?"

"If only Alexander knew of your intentions, and not his detested son! Still the inference needs no cart-horse to draw, signor," said the Hospitaller; and there was a moment's general but most emphatic silence.

"Nay, sir knight, though you be my noble and most gallant deliverer, I pray you speak not thus!"

said the Orsino, his countenance becoming of a livid paleness. "Lucrezia is as good as she is beautiful, and 'tis blasphemy even in madness to dream such hideous phantoms."

"You are fortunate in thinking so, my lord," said the knight, very coldly.

"Her charities are boundless! There is not a beggar on this side Po but has tasted of them," continued the young baron.

"They had need be, to cover such sins, uncle Niccolò," said the fool, with a vacant look, as if of inquiry, at the Florentine.

"Beware that these soldiers hear not our prattle, Lord Paolo; they serve the duke," said Ser Machiavelli, with real uneasiness.

"Nay, the worst of my English is a match for the best of yon mixed scum!" said Le Beaufort, scornfully. "And the thieves are mostly asleep in their litters, and truly, being chiefly salvages, they can understand but little of what we speak at this distance."

"Sooner than wed this lady, were she Dame Venus herself," exclaimed Le Beaufort, who had been musing for some minutes, a very unwont practice with him, "I would wed the fiend's eldest daughter, with damnation for her dowry!"

"Were she even that, and death the high priest who should solemnize our bridal, I would to my grave with rapture, if only her beauty shared it with me," returned the passionate Italian.

"She must needs be beautiful!" said the canon, with a glance at the Hospitaller.

“Perchance the sire and son *then* made signs to each other in this affair of your betrayal, Signor Orsino?” said the unmoved chevalier.

“For in the rose there was a wasp
Which stung his nose to smell—to smell,
And then he blamed the rose—the rose—
And flung it in—a well,”

improvisated the jester, with a sarcastic and yet vacant expression, as if he lost sight as he went on of his own meaning.

“No, no, sir Knight!—indeed such treachery were impossible!” exclaimed Messer Bembo.

“But hath *he* been thrusting his hand in among the thorns too, that he complains so bitterly?” continued the zany, gazing still more earnestly on the priestly knight; but suddenly turning a look of stony stupidity to the Orsino, who for the first time was regarding him with attention.

“Light of Heaven! what is impossible to the Borgias?” exclaimed the Hospitaller, without heeding the canon’s deprecating look. “For what cause do men report that the unfortunate Duke of Gandia was murdered?”

“There is a Roland for an Oliver—Cæsar is Duke of Romagna,” said Le Beaufort, laughing, but not with his usual cheer.

“Rome was founded by a fratricide; why, uncle, ’tis the very man to restore her?” said the jester, with a sudden sparkling of his diamond eyes as he glanced at Messer Niccolò.

“Of a truth, and Rome is as full of thieves and

vagabonds as ever it was in that chieftain's palmiest day," said the ambassador, with a forced smile. "Signor Orsino, you are aware that it is not the policy of my serene lords to make peace between your faction and the duke; but surely his affairs being at such a pass and low ebb, he could not but have every motive to act sincerely and fairly by you, who are the chief agent in this reconciliation?"

"Moreover," said the Orsino, eagerly snatching at this straw, "in proof of his sincerity, Cæsar betrayed to me the secret dealings of those gentlemen of Bologna with him, the Marescotti, who were willing, from their hatred of the Bentivogli, to surrender the city to him."

"He betrayed them because he thought they had not power to keep their promises," said the relentless Hospitaller.

"Then is he a very shame of knighthood, a base disloyal chevalier!" exclaimed Sir Reginald vehemently.

"Dare you tell him so in Rome, Sir Knight?" said Machiavelli, with an uneasy smile.

"Yea, or in his native hell!" returned the young knight. A slight gesture from the zany cut short some reply which Messer Niccolò intended to have made. "Nay ye cannot blame some eggs for hatching crocodiles," the former observed, with his strange unmeaning look presenting its usual contrast to his pregnant words.

"I do grieve to hear ye talk in this heedless manner, gentlemen," said the canon; "for indeed you must needs involve our holy mother, the church

herself, in this scandal which you throw upon her supreme minister on earth ; yea, sap the foundations of our blessed faith, for can that religion be divine which has a monster of abominable wickedness for its representative on earth ? ”

“ He was elected by simony, and therefore but usurps his seat until the thunder drives him out of it,” returned the Hospitaller with vehemence.

“ Or the confederacy of the Roman barons, who I do hear plot some such security to themselves,” said the Florentine ambassador.

“ The vengeance of heaven has already overtaken his electors, and even by his agency, for their sin against the Holy Ghost,” continued the Knight of St. John. “ Cardinal Colonna is in exile, Julian della Rovere, Ascanio Sforza, Savelli, are stripped of their possessions, and have fled from Rome for their lives ; the old Cardinal of Capua was poisoned ; Cardinal Orsino and the Archbishop of Florence will be destroyed in time with the rest of their name, Signor Paolo !—Cardinal Michele died very suddenly—but then he was old and rich.”

“ And yet it may well be that Heaven . . . that is—only so violent and terrible a spirit as that of his sanctity could restore the grandeur of the church, and her plundered inheritance, and therefore Heaven may have suffered his elevation,” said the canon, somewhat staggered.

“ Nay, ’tis perchance the devil’s master-piece, to poison the source that men may refuse to drink of the stream, or to set them on digging wells of heresy

for themselves and their children to drink destruction at," said Messer Niccolò, with a subtle and as it were inward smile.

"A lawyer, a soldier, and a priest!—is that the receipt to make a devil, uncle, for he hath been all by turns?" said the Zany.

"And adjudged so great in all!" replied the Florentine. "Surely there hath been infinitely worse said of him than he deserved; 'tis his immoderate love of power, and of his children, his desire to aggrandize his name, his vast and furious passions, which have driven him into such monstrous acts of tyranny, which are yet so well directed that they can scarcely be accused of injustice. Which of his victims has not deserved his fate?"

"But how accuse you the cardinal of simony, when, at the time of his election, no saint in Heaven ever had so high a reputation for all divine and human virtue as he had on earth?" chimed in the canon.

"Hideous hypocrisy!" returned the Knight of St. John. "But I am willing to admit that his son is the worse demon of the two, and that he stimulates the angry old man to his furious acts; for until Cæsar acquired influence in his counsels, Rome was governed as if by the Areopagus. Nay, even now, at times, they say, he hath fits of remorse, and would halt, but for the torrent which urges him on! Alexander is a mad tiger, but Cæsar is a cross between the tiger and the snake."

"Noble knight, I would advise you, for your

goodly person's sake, let not the walls hear you whisper matter like this in Rome," said the ambassador, very earnestly.

"In Rome my deliverer will be under my custody; and we Orsini have bearded the pope and Cæsar both in it!" said Signor Paolo, with a haughty flush of his pale cheeks.

"I know your family is very powerful, my lord; but you speak it strangely for a vassal of the Holy See," returned Messer Niccolò, coldly.

"If there be one species of wickedness this Cæsar hath not committed, by'r lady, I know not what name he gives it in confession!" said the young English knight. "In my land we should have smothered him at his birth, had he shown his soul in his visage!"

"Why strangled ye not your king then, Cæsar's pattern, Richard Crookback?" said the canon, drily. "Shone the sun ever on a blacker miscreant than he?"

"Speak not against King Richard, or, by the mass!—cry you mercy, sir canon! but you know not that 'twas that brave king who made me a knight, on the morning of Bosworth field, and gave me the broom from his own bonnet for a cognisance!" exclaimed Le Beaufort, warmly.

"Marry, and what good feat of arms had you done, being, as I take it, then scarcely a dozen years old?" said Ser Machiavelli. "Tell me, I pray you, sir, for I know that king did little without a reason."

"My father, brother, and their following withdrew, in the night, to join Richmond, that is now king,"

replied the knight. "But I, who knew nothing of Richard's misdeeds, and loved his valiant chivalry, secretly left them and returned to his camp; which, when he knew, he swore by St. Paul I was worth all my kindred, and shouting, 'Oh, mon Beaufort, seras *le* Beaufort,' he drew his sword and knighted me, with so hearty a stroke that my back ached for a week after,—when the poor king himself was nigh rotten in Leicester Abbey."

"In very faith, brother Reginald, a notary might make a fair penny of the list of the Cæsar's crimes," continued the Hospitaller, with unslackened heat.

"Crimes imputed, sir, it were more fit and just to say," returned Messer Niccolò, speaking also with much warmth. "But what hath been proved against the Borgias? Are the accusations of their bitter enemies, whom they have dispossessed of unjust and insolent usurpations, to be taken for gospel? Alexander endeavours to restore the rights of the Church over her vassals; they resist—he crushes them—he is therefore a tyrant! The princes of the Church rebel against their sovereign—he banishes their persons, and confiscates their wealth—he is therefore an oppressor! His eldest son falls by the hand of a secret rival, and therefore his brother has slain him, and oh, horror of horrors, animated by what unimaginable jealousy!"

"The sons-in-law of the pontiff are slaughtered one after another, and men hint there is a reason for it," said the Hospitaller, ironically imitating the tone of Messer Niccolò. "The Bishop of Selta is poisoned, and country folks dream that he perished for daring

to falsify Cæsar's denial that he had brought the bull with him to France which dissolved the marriage of King Louis with his cousin, the cripple, and gave him the buxom widow of Brittany to spouse. They war down the chief barons of Rome, and utterly ruin them; turn their arms against the feudatories of Romagna, and then people have the simplicity to think they mean to erect their own tyranny on the ruins of the common liberties!"

"Some old voluptuaries die suddenly, and therefore Cæsar has poisoned them!" said Messer Niccolò, with a degree of pettishness, which even his practised dissimulation could not suppress, in his tones.

"Nay, young ones, too!" retorted the resolute Hospitaller. "The Grand Signor offers three hundred thousand gold ducats for the life of his rebel and fugitive brother, Sultan Zem; and even in the very camp of the King of France, who did so lovingly intend to use him in his crusade against the accursed Turk, he perished, by poison."

"And therefore follows it of course that the Borgias did it? If Bajazet would give so great a price for his brother's death, could he find no other hand nor means to procure it?" said the Florentine.

"Cicero's question regarding a crime whose perpetrator is unknown were a fair touchstone—*Cui bono*, to whose advantage was it?" returned the Hospitaller. "Who but Cæsar inherited the young Turk's treasures, his seraglio, and all the plunder which he had borne into Italy after the failure of his rebellion?"

"The state is the lawful heir of all foreigners who

die without leaving any other, and it pleased the sacred chamber to transfer its rights to monsignor the Cardinal of Valenza, as he then was," interposed the Orsino.

"You mean, my lord, that it pleased the Cardinal of Valenza to have it, and the prothonotary, Giovanni Battista Ferraro, to sign it over to him in the name of the sacred chamber," returned the Hospitaller. "The cardinal of Valenza! a sweet churchman, truly, that stole a dedicated nun from the cloisters, and one too that bore the noblest name in Rome, a Colonna."

"You shall pardon me, sir; the Orsini yield to none; our charters are the oldest which the church ever granted!" said Signor Paolo, with an asperity, which was perhaps as much occasioned by the disparaging tone of the religious knight's observations upon his promised bride, as even the fierce hatred and emulation which had existed between his race and that of the Colonnas for many ages. "Moreover, 'tis well known that it was the pagan sultan who lured that hapless damosel to her destruction, eternal and temporal."

"Nay, that was only the pretext which that chivalrous Turk allowed to be used, to varnish Alexander's refusal to seize and punish her as the canon law enjoins," said the stern Knight of St. John.

"Messer Bembo, I pray you tell me what punishment that may be?" said Sir Reginald, turning to the ecclesiastic with an expression of some interest.

"Her punishment would be immuration; that is, she ought to be bricked up in the convent wall, and

in the cloisters where the sisters walk, that they may not soon forget it," replied the canon, gravely. "But you do not often hear of these sentences being properly executed, to the great relaxation of discipline."

"Then all honour to Pope Alexander, and I drink his health a thousand times, that would not suffer it!" exclaimed the hearty young English knight, swallowing a deep draught of the canon's wine.

"Methinks, gentlemen, the night being far wasted, and this conversation likely to bear no good fruit, it were time we hopped up on our perches," interrupted Ser Machiavelli, with a feigned yawn. "Signor Paolo, you most of all need rest."

"But I would not have it last too long," said the Orsino, starting from a reverie into which he had fallen, and looking palely around at the sleeping soldiery, and the silent Carthusians, who had yet been listening with the eager interest which only men so long secluded from the world take in its affairs. "Who knows," he continued, in explanation of the somewhat singular observation, "who knows what these wild soldiers of the Borgia's may have overheard or project?" And his eye fell with a puzzled and profound earnestness on the countenance of the fool, who had for some time nodded and dozed on his lowly couch.

"I will watch, then," said Sir Reginald, "and, lest I fall asleep, will stride up and down the hall till I see as many shadows on the wall as there are moonbeams on the windows."

"Brother, we will watch turn about," said the

Hospitaller, gravely smiling, "or we shall have thee dropping from the saddle to-morrow."

"That will be much the best," said the canon, who loved his ease and safety almost equally. "And but that I am nigh dead with the jolting of my mule, I would let none of you share the vigil with me, for you are young and need rest, God knows." So saying, he adjusted himself as comfortable a couch as he could achieve out of the materials at hand, and finally fell asleep on it, without learning with any nicety the issue of a controversy which arose between the Orsino and his two deliverers, the former of whom insisted on taking his turn in this seemingly superfluous watch. But so powerfully worked in men's imaginations the extraordinary anecdotes of the Borgia subtlety and cruelty, which had formed the staple of the conversation, that no one seemed to perceive anything ridiculous or excessive in the precaution.

CHAPTER X.

“ Nihil jus, nihil fas ; aurum, vis, et Venus imperabat.”

Cardinal of Viterbo.

No laws, no rights ; gold, violence, and licentiousness ruling all.

WHETHER the Hospitaller and his wild-spirited young comrade kept their watches so sedulously as they had promised, we cannot take upon us to aver ; but the restlessness of the Orsino, who, notwithstanding his exhaustion, scarcely slept three minutes together without starting awake, rendered any other vigilance almost unnecessary. He was the first to announce the break of day, and to rouse the travellers, urging the expediency of reaching the plains before the heat of the sun set in. The Orsino's anxiety to be in Rome had become akin to a passion in its extreme eagerness and impatience ; but it took a somewhat discourteous form when he privately urged on the English knight that they should set forward without waiting for the company of Ser Machiavelli and his men-at-arms, which he declared would very much delay them. If Sir Reginald intended to accede to this arrangement, it was foiled by the zany, who suddenly started from his slumbers,

and blew a blast upon a horn, which chanced to be near him, so loud and shrill, that it would have awakened Arthur and all his knights from the petrified sleep in the Welch cavern. The effect was instantaneous, and so far from parting company, Ser Niccolò, still rubbing his eyes, entreated that his fellow-pilgrims would not hurry themselves, for rather than miss their society, he would tarry the whole day.

Paolo's diligence, however, at least hastened the departure. Mass was said, a solemn benediction bestowed by the prior of the Carthusians, and leaving divers gifts, and the promise of many more, but truth to say with but a scanty breakfast, the military cavalcade streamed, glittering and irregular as a mountain water, down to the shores of the Nar, or Nera, as it is more commonly called in Italy. The monks watched the departure from their rocky heights, and as they disappeared, one or two so far overcame their stoicism as to wave a farewell with their brown, bare arms.

It was a morning such as is only seen in southern climates, and at similar elevations—the air so pure and bright that it seemed to show all objects as if through a shining medium of glass. A faint rosiness tinged the transparent blue of the sky, and all the tops of the mountains were touched with a deeper hue of the same beautiful colour. The valley, although partially veiled in mists, began to disclose its richness and variety. Little villages appeared nestling at the craggy bases of the mountains; castles and minor forts towered on remote pinnacles; fo-

rests of beech and pine waved freshly in the wind ; pastures of the brightest emerald green bordered the river ; every rock displayed in its nooks and crannies wild flowers of brilliant hues ; every fan of the soft morning breeze brought some sweet scent ! The very cataract, though lost in snowy mists, wore a diadem—a rainbow spanning it in a circular form of the palest pink and azure. So fresh and lovely shone the scene, that as they journeyed on the wild path which bordered the river, among its tangled underwood of myrtles, stunted vines, and high weeds, which sometimes nearly concealed both horse and rider, while the loftier forest trees showered their golden dew continually on them as they passed, the canon could not hinder himself from exclaiming aloud, “ This is Italy !—Lombardy is a lie.”

An echo of surprising distinctness and musical cadence immediately took up the words, and repeated them in sweet low murmurs, so like the remote melody of women’s voices, that for a moment the canon stared aghast. But remembering himself, he observed in soliloquy, “ No marvel they fable Echo a nymph—there seemed to be a hundred babbling to one another yonder ! But it is some comfort to behold these fat pastures ! We shall come to something by and by not fed—or rather starved—for the tables of yonder mortified men, who might consider that whatever merit there is in their own abstinence, none thereof accrues to those whom their inhospitality compels to share it !”

The cavalcade proceeded with as much order as the ruggedness of the way allowed, which dived into

valleys and ascended craggy steeps apparently at pleasure of its own sweet will, but seldom leaving the river at any considerable distance. The Orsino and Sir Reginald kept each other close company, the former mounted on a horse belonging to one of the latter's robust followers, who yet easily maintained his place with the train on foot.

Perhaps the very contrariety of character between the Italian noble and his new friend was one of the causes of the liking they had evidently taken to each other. The frank, joyous, unsuspecting nature of the one, afforded a secret satisfaction to the dark, impassioned, and brooding genius of the other. The vivacity and careless good nature of the Knight of the Sun presented humanity under a light which the black experience of the times had rarely offered to the Italian baron. It was a relief to the overwrought and complex mind to watch the undisguised and simple operations of intellect almost in a state of nature, untrammelled by too much knowledge either of books or men. The English nobility plumed themselves in that age chiefly on physical qualities. They very much resembled their ancestors of the Round Table, when Merlin put upon them the jocularly of asking their counsel on affairs of state; who, after looking at each other for some time, at a loss to understand what was required of them, unanimously exclaimed, "We are very BIG!" On the contrary, the Italians had reached,—or rather had retained, from the ruins of their ancient civilization,—a diseased excess of the intellectual qualities,—and their rulers, who considered politics as a

game of skill, were astonished and overwhelmed at the first shock of the nations who, in the fifteenth century, contended for the possession of Italy. War with the Italians had become almost a bloodless game—a tournament in the open field—when Charles VIII. invaded Naples, and the first experience of the sanguinary earnestness of the transalpine warfare infused a terror into the conquered, which was only succeeded by a still more bloody ferocity in themselves. These two convulsive epochs produced such mingled characters as Paolo Orsino and Cæsar Borgia, comparing them merely in the union at once of southern subtlety with northern ferocity.

Messer Bembo and the Florentine ambassador kept up such grave conversation as suited their dignified stations, on the aspect of political affairs, in which the great labour of both was to hide their real opinions, and worm out each other's. The Hospitaller but rarely seemed to notice what was said, except occasionally by sternly smiling at some enthusiastic praise of the Lady Lucrezia, which Paolo frequently managed to introduce into his discourse. The warmth of the Lord Paolo's imagination, and perhaps a secret desire to apologize for the strange weakness of loving a woman whose brother he believed to have attempted his life, and whose name was so fearfully darkened, gave his eloquence on this point a glow of colour which the subject and the voluptuous influence of the sunny air they breathed, made less wearisome to his hearers than such eulogiums usually are. Meanwhile the zany flitted about, sometimes behind, sometimes in front, sometimes

shooting far ahead of the troop; now engaged in a mock deep conversation with a trooper, then darting off in pursuit of some bee humming among the aromatic furze, which he deprived of its honey-bag with great skill, so as not to be stung by the luckless insect as he slowly ravelled out its bowels, returning from his excursions fantastically crowned with golden thistles, or with his mantle richly ornamented with burrs. The Orsino watched this volatile being at times with an unquiet eye, but to as little purpose as one might the inconstant light reflected from dancing water.

But few persons passed the travellers on this unfrequented road; at times a solitary pilgrim emerged from some secluded nook in which he had passed the night; or a hermit appeared at prayers, perched in some hole of the cliffs above; or a peasant, bronzed almost to blackness, bent in abject homage to the warlike train as it passed the entrance of his wild ravine. The procession was fast disentangling itself from the tortuous bases of the mountains, and the canon was in high spirits, expatiating on the various scenes they passed, and displaying great antiquarian learning to very insensible listeners, when they suddenly came in sight of the ruined arches of a bridge of vast marble blocks, which had once united the two sides of the defile by crossing the river. On its lofty summit appeared two figures; one, that of a goat, quietly browsing on the edge of the broken central arch, the other, to judge by the momentary flash of the sun on it as it disappeared, a man in steel. Through the crags beneath the bridge appeared a steep hill, covered with

cypress trees and leaden-tinted olives, through which peeped numerous towers and terraces, as if of some flourishing city.

The canon endeavoured for a moment to persuade himself that he had not seen the glitter of armour on the bridge; but while he was reasoning with his senses on the subject, a trumpet was audible at no great distance, which was immediately answered by one more remote, and suddenly a body of horsemen, in bright armour, with spears set in the rests, and banners streaming, emerged from the groves of the hilly city. Our travellers simultaneously reined up their horses, and gazed in great alarm at the advancing troop.

“Perhaps they are only pilgrims going to Rome,” said the canon, desperately.

“Why, then, are they in armour, and with their backs turned to Rome?” replied the Knight of St. John.

“Mayhap they are friends of my Lord Paolo, come to see how it fares with him?” said Machiavelli, with a slight shrug of the shoulders.

“I know not how my friends should dare to leave Rome in such force, considering whom they may expect to find at the gates on their return!” exclaimed the Orsino. “But, no, Our sweet Mother in Heaven! see you not it is the banner of the church! the cross keys! the sword of St. Peter!”

“Ho, there, spears in rest!” shouted Sir Reginald, looking round for his men, but he was somewhat surprised to observe that his immediate followers were the Borgian guards—who, however, couched their lances instantly.

“Beware, sirs! look that you are not assailed both

in front and back !” said Messer Niccolò in a low tone, and adding, with an expression of sarcastic humour, “you and I are safe enough, brother Bembo ; for doubtless you will now think it meet to take upon you your true and inviolable character of ambassador from the Duke of Ferrara !”

“Messer Niccolò, your jests might find a fitter season,” said the canon, in a strange flutter. “But, at all events, we are vowed pilgrims to the blessed jubilee, and—but these fellows may be only vassals of some noble airing their horses, or foragers of Ronciglione.”

“And yonder is the jester among them ! I do hope they will not maltreat the gibbering idiot—but I know that I am lost !” said the Orsino, in a calm and deliberate tone of despair.

“I, for one, will not desert you, the betrothed of Donna Lucrezia, and on that faith will mingle blood with you !” said the Hospitaller, and drawing his dagger he pricked his arm till the blood spurted from the wound, and handed it covered with crimson to the Lord Paolo.

The latter immediately, in the enthusiasm of gratitude, tore open his doublet, and drew the drops which he mingled from his breast, directly above the heart ; and he had scarcely performed his part in the ceremony ere Sir Reginald snatched the weapon, and after hesitating for an instant, as if to select the most appropriate proof of his friendly zeal, slashed a little cross in his broad left shoulder, from which he unclasped the armour. This was a ceremony which constituted the three knights brothers-in-arms, and

was one of the most sacred and indissoluble rites of chivalry. And hardly had the affrighted canon surveyed in sorrow the consummation of an act which imposed duties so likely to prove inconvenient, ere the approaching horsemen halted with a sudden clash of arms under the ruined bridge, whose arches towered at a great height above them.

The spare, but tall and sinewy figures, the buff armour, the prodigiously long spears, round shields, and cross-bows; the vast mustachios and beards, the exact discipline, the small fiery jennets which they gauntly bestrode, the red ruffs round their necks, the numerous leaden Lambs-of-God with which their breasts were studded; marked the troops to be Spanish, or rather Catalan, for those national designations were still kept as jealously distinct as Scot and Englishman, or Burgundian and Frenchman; although, unlike the latter, the provinces of the peninsula might be considered as united into one monarchy under Ferdinand and Isabel.

The leader of this party seemed to be a horseman who separated himself from their ranks, and came riding at a slow and equable pace towards the pilgrims, giving ample leisure to form a correct idea of his personnel. He was of middle stature and of a spare frame, which was yet muscularly powerful, war-worn until the flesh seemed as tough as leather. The features were lean and large, and mingled something of the Arab in the hard-cut nostrils, thick lips, olive complexion, and coarse hair, thick and wiry as that of a bull. The eye had nothing of the mistrust and melancholy thought of the Italian; but it was reserved,

stern, and, so to speak, stonily determined, without giving a hint on what; the gazer felt that there were few human weaknesses remaining in the soul which looked out at those cold crystals. He was armed at all points in dull iron plates excepting the head, on which he wore a steel cap, by way of relaxation from the weight of his helmet, which he carried at the pommel of his high saddle.

Abasing his lance with an appearance of some deference, the stranger approached the group of pilgrims, surveying them with fixed but not menacing attention. The Knight of St. John spurred his horse slightly forward, with a haughty wave of his lance, and the opposite cavalier immediately drew his rein, horse and rider standing fixed as an equestrian statue in bronze.

“Is your business with us, condottiero?” said the Hospitaller, who observed at a glance that his opponent wore not the golden spurs of knighthood. “Or wherefore have you halted your men in our way?”

“My name is Don Miguel de Murviedro—Migueloto men commonly call me—captain of the castle and legation of Ronciglione, reverend knight!” replied the Catalan with stern conciseness. “Therefore, methinks I have some right to inquire what your armed band do here at Narni; else I am but little inclined to a dispute, for I am on an errand that brooks no delay, from my commander, the Podestà of Romagna; being to seek out, and rescue, if need be, by force of arms, the person of his holiness’s son-in-law elect, the most noble lord, Dom Paolo Orsino,

from the hands of certain traitors and vagabond plunderers who have seized and confined him for ransom in the hills about the Marble Fall."

"Then, sir, you may even turn back rejoicing, for I am rescued and in perfect safety, journeying here with my friends!" said the Italian knight, advancing and gazing with wild and startled earnestness at the iron figure before him, either from some secret suspicion which entered his mind, or from the recollection that he beheld before him a man who was believed to be the instrument of Cæsar's most atrocious deeds, at once a bloody soldier of fortune and a crafty assassin.

"Then, my most illustrious lord, I shall have the honour of escorting your excellence to the castle of Ronciglione," replied the condottiero, alighting, as it seemed, to show his profound respect; "Don Remiro awaits you there, and will thence accompany your lordship to Rome."

"I thank you, valiant gentleman, and your sender, but it needs not, as I am now in good and sure hands, to whom I joyfully entrust myself," replied the Orsino.

"I pray your noble lordship to remember that I am a soldier, sworn to obey his officers, and the supreme podestà has sent me on this errand and no other, to bring your excellent person to Ronciglione," replied Migueloto, with a tone and gesture which struggled between cajolery and command. "After what has happened, Don Remiro will not permit a safety so essential to that of the state, so dear to the duke, his master, to be under any other guardianship

but his own. My life may pay the penalty of disobedience."

"You mean not of a surety to say that you will take this gentleman with you against his will?" said Le Beaufort, impatiently vibrating his lance.

"I must obey the orders of the lieutenant of the Duke of Romagna, sir knight," replied the Catalan, with a smile darkening rather than lighting his visage. "And, if I mistake not, you have lances belonging to his highness both before and behind you. Therefore I leave your excellencies to deliberation; but you cannot and must not pass on this way but in my company, and to Ronciglione."

Enraged at this reply, Le Beaufort couched his lance impetuously, but Bembo and Ser Niccolò both seized it, while the Catalan, affecting not to notice the action, and bowing almost to his belt, backed his horse to the troopers beyond the aqueduct.

"What is to be done?" said the canon in a doleful voice; "it is impossible for us to resist."

"So long as they stand one to ten my English will not turn their backs!" exclaimed Le Beaufort.

"But meanwhile your own backs should be looked to, sir," said Machiavelli; "it were not, perchance, inexpedient to remember as much whom you have behind as before."

"Nay, gallant brothers, you shall not uselessly perish in so hopeless a brawl, for my sake," said the Orsino sadly, but adding more cheerfully, "Don Remiro is not altogether my unfriend; and but for this Migueloto!—laugh at me and my moony madness if you will,—but it seems to me as if he resem-

bled in stature and voice the chief of the Black Band which captured me !”

“Sound then a charge, and if these rogues behind us stir—let them look to their own rear;” said the fiery young Knight of the Sun.

“Tush, brother, it were certain overthrow ! But ill betide me when I desert a companion by blood !” said the more sober Hospitaller. “We will with Signor Paolo to Ronciglione ; and our presence may haply avert any mischief, if mischief be intended.”

“What else by a Borgia ?” muttered the canon. “And moreover, I have oft known suspicion put the harm into people’s heads, as heaping sand-bags directs besiegers where they are most dangerous.”

But despite this and much more eloquent protest, the canon’s advice was overruled, and the brothers-in-arms resolved to swim or sink together. It was agreed that the Orsino should announce their resolution to Don Migueloto, Ser Niccolò consenting, with another of his emphatic shrugs, to see that the conditions were duly observed, while Le Beaufort rejoined his own men, and prepared them for either event. But on turning with that intent, and riding towards the escort, he perceived to his great indignation that they kept their spears couched as if to receive him on the points.

“St. George and rescue !” shouted the impetuous knight in English, rising in the stirrup and setting his lance ; and his followers, hearing the cry, suddenly couched the long spears on which they had been leaning, though quite unconscious of the occasion of so abrupt a breach of good fellowship. But at this

moment the zany, springing nimbly before Sir Reginald, called to the escort to open their ranks, in a tone which they instinctively obeyed. He then ran up the passage thus made, striking with his bauble saucily on both sides, until he reached the English men-at-arms.

“Broom-flowers ! broom-flowers ! St. George, the dragon wants you !” he said, with a loud idiotic laugh.

Observing that their lord motioned them to advance, the English riders immediately filed through the open ranks of their quondam allies, and rejoined him at the instant that the Orsino and Ser Niccolò returned to say that Don Migueloto was perfectly willing to accede to the required terms.

Matters were now arranged apparently to the satisfaction of all parties ; Migueloto, with a courteous apology, directing his soldiers to take the lead in the ascent towards Narni. But he himself waited beneath the arches, with his steel cap in his hand, until the knights, the ambassador, and the canon, with their English men-at-arms, had passed through. Cæsar’s guardsmen then set their horses in motion, and followed, so that the little party in the centre were very completely enclosed.

Perhaps aware that his presence might suggest recollections which he did not desire to rouse, Don Migueloto lingered to some distance in the rear. It was certainly not to admire the magnificent combinations of scenery which the ascent to Narni offered—its castled summit overlooking a wide expanse of forest, and the valley through which tum-

bled and foamed the Nar from its lofty home in the mountains—that Don Migueloto occasionally paused and looked around. If his eye rested for a moment on the superb landscape, it was only to form a vague idea of the goodly plunder which so rich a land might yield, not to enjoy the gorgeous variety of beauty which its mountains, forests, and vast valley offered to the eye.

The real object of his search soon appeared, in the person of the zany, who came bounding and gibbering along, until he reached the Catalan's side, when, with a leap of singular agility, he suddenly seated himself on the crupper behind him.

"Go on; they will but take it for a fool's jest, even if they observe us," said the zany, in a tone of habitual authority. "By'r lady! it costs me some trouble to put my skeins in order after such a raveling as thy blundering hand has made!"

"By the beard of Santiago, my lord, I am not to blame in the matter!" replied Don Migueloto. "Such is Don Remiro's vigilance, that my men could not by any means have traversed the country without his permission; but when I showed him your grace's unlimited commission, he had the insolence to produce an order under his holiness's own hand, commanding him on pain of his head to escort the Orsino safely to the gates of Rome; or if his lordship chose to keep his incognito, to observe that he sustained no damage or molestation on the way. When I asked him how he came to think that any harm was intended to the Lord Paolo, he replied that his holiness had taken alarm

on that matter only; so if my business touched not the Orsino, I was at freedom to fulfil your honoured commands."

"Ay, indeed! and not otherwise?" murmured the jester.

"Nay, my lord, for when I found myself driven to a pass at which I was bound to acknowledge your gracious will, he disputed a good hour that you could not mean any such treachery, as he called it; and said at last that he was podestà of the Church, and not of the Duke of Romagna."

"Ha! is he of that opinion!" exclaimed the Borgia. "Ungrateful bosom-serpent! Have I supported this sanguinary judge so long,—this bloodier Draco,—not only against the outcries of the people, but the angry remonstrances of my father,—but for this!"

"Perchance there are folks at Rome who were not grieved to see what hatred to your government is planted in men's hearts by the podestà's relentless justice!" returned the insidious ruffian.

"Good!—but they shall learn I know how to use men so as they shall do me all the good they can, and none of the harm," returned the Borgia. "Remiro has crushed Romagna into order and obedience; what if I turn him forth as a goat of atonement into the wilderness?"

"I fear your grace's friends will have less cause to love him still; I know there are great messages passing between the Vatican and Ronciglione!" said Don Migueloto. "Even when at length I expounded your gracious purpose most clearly, he

turned as pale as a goose's liver, and would only consent that I should capture the Orsino until he could receive tidings of your pleasure from your own lips! That is, till he could warn the Orsino in Rome, and the Vitelli, at Castello; and this on threat of sawing me in halves if I disobeyed!"

"Sawing thee in halves!—this Aragonian teaches me a way of death I did not know, but a good punishment for traitors!" said Cæsar, thoughtfully. "Is he not very rich, too—very rich, considering the needs of the state, and the oppressions of the poor peasants?"

"And therefore he strives so hard to win our holy father's sunshine?" said the Catalan. "He fears your grace much more than loves you, and gropes about for help; and his extorted wealth is lodged in Ronciglione to prevent surprise."

"Deem you these soldiers are to be depended upon?" returned Cæsar, with a slight smile.

"Their terrors of Remiro can only be overcome by your personal interference," replied the Catalan, "I am an officer of no eminent command, as your highness knows."

"Tut, tut, thou art on thy way to a better!" returned the Borgia.

"So your goodness was pleased to promise me on an occasion ——"

"I tell thee I have not forgotten it! 'Tis against thyself to remind me of my promises, for I have much greater largess in store for thee!" interrupted Cæsar, impatiently. "Has the sun ever ceased to shine upon thee since thou didst aid me to remove

that shadow which covered mine? How long is it, rogue, since thou wert in Rome?"

"I pray your grace to remember that I am a born gentleman, and may not brook a title which we only bestow on low-born scum and varlets!" said the Catalan, haughtily.

"In faith I cannot mend it unless for a worse," said Cæsar, with a scornful laugh. "Go to, gentleman and villain! how long is it since thou wert in Rome?"

"Your orders found me there, monsignor," replied the ruffian, somewhat cowed in tone.

"Indeed! then I may gather news at will; for thou art none of those who look on and see nothing, or bring half tidings which but puzzle expectation! How is my peevish sire? what thinks he of these latest doings of ours?"

"Even as ever, my lord; glorying in the aggrandizement of his house, but starting and shirking at the means," returned Migueloto.

"Nay, that is not all!—what said he to my messenger, that carried him the keys of Faenza?" said the Borgia, gloomily. "'Cæsar is making me a giant,—but a giant in chains!'"

"In sad truth, his holiness grows very snarling and suspicious with age," said the Catalan.

"I hear he hath named the old dotard, Cardinal Piccolomini of Sienna, to command in Santangelo!" returned Cæsar, sharply, "during the jubilee?"

"What matters it, signor, when the Germans and Gascons in it are yours to a man!" said Don Migueloto. "Yet 'tis a sad thought to remember

how much depends on the whims of a choleric old man, whose conscience is subject to fits of the qualms !”

“Speak with more respect, infidel, of the successor of St. Peter !” said Cæsar, in a jesting tone. “But what are the news from Milan, for I have heard none during these tramping days of mine, wandering among my citadels ?”

“A herald from the King of France passed through Ronciglione yesterday with, I fear, some bitter message from his king at Milan to our holy father and your highness !” replied Don Migueloto.

“The King of France at Milan !—surely you jest, my stout Migueloto !” exclaimed Cæsar, with an expression of mingled wonder and consternation.

“Monsignor, is it possible you have not heard how the French have rushed on Milan, destroyed and slaughtered all opposers ; and that Duke Sforza is now their prisoner by the treachery of his Swiss ?”

“You rave, man !—it cannot be ! The last accounts left their foragers in Savoy !” continued Cæsar, incredulously. But the details which his confidant now poured out of the extraordinary conquest which Louis XII. effected of the Milanese after their second revolt, left no room for doubt.

“Here were matter now for a good morality on the fall of wicked princes !” said Cæsar, recovering from his surprise. “And yet, so subtle a brain—welcomed back so joyfully by his subjects—how could it chance ? Did he not pay his mercenaries enough, or too much ? Friend Niccolò, this is a problem which I must have thee to solve for

me. Those accursed Swiss ! who, after this, will trust them ?”

“ Certes, not your grace ; and I misdoubt if they have forgotten that glorious massacre you made among them in Rome, in revenge for the pillage of your mother’s house by their brethren of King Charles’s army,” said Migueloto.

“ Thou knowest men but little, if thou deemest there is any bottom to their credulity,” returned the Borgia, sharply.

“ His holiness seems to think as I do, natheless, signor, since he has made those whom his interposition saved from our swords guards to my most noble lady, Donna Lucrezia !” said Migueloto, with a peculiarly leering and malignant expression.

“ Soh !” was the only observation in return, which was yet full of meaning to the initiated attendant.

“ And on the news of your highness’s happy return, he has added a hundred light-armed estradiots of the fugitive Albanian Greeks, who keep skimming all over the country around Nepi, like fire-flies round a pool,” continued Migueloto.

“ Nepi ! what doth she there ?” said Cæsar, with affected carelessness.

“ Performs a penance—for other folks’ sins, perchance !” replied Don Migueloto, with a dark smile. “ For doubtless, in honour of your victories and happy return, his sanctity has created his daughter Duchess of Nepi, a seigneury which takes her oft from Rome, and which hath a strong castle.”

“ Jest not with me, Migueloto ; ’tis ill tickling a gored hound,” said Cæsar, with a flash of passion

which effectually awed his companion out of his jocose mood ; and then, as if wishing to banish the subject, he continued, “ But truly this strange success of the French alters all my views ! I am already sufficiently pressed by the rebellious confederates, and I fear me France will be peevish for my necessary denial of the troops to the constable of Milan. Who could have dreamed of so sudden a turn in the luck ! ”

“ Your enemies will everywhere take heart, my lord,” said Migueloto, dolefully.

“ One good may yet be derived from this evil,” returned Cæsar. “ I can depend no longer on the French, and the pope cannot deny me now to raise an Italian army of my own, which Niccolò doth above all things advise.”

Migueloto shook his head with a crafty smile. “ He will rather make peace with the Colonnas themselves, than set your grace in such mastery,” he replied.

“ Said I not that even this mischance of the Orsino was meant by fortune to my advantage ? ” exclaimed Cæsar. “ I must have peace with his faction at every risk, to avert the Colonnas, and therefore do now rejoice in his safety.”

“ At every risk, my lord ? ” said Don Migueloto, with the same disgusting leer overspreading his evil countenance.

“ No, I will never again endure—but, tush, let us to our news again ! ” said Cæsar, with a vehemence which he almost instantly checked. “ How is the

Cardinal Borgia, my cousin ? he was ailing when he left me at Faenza."

"Alack, my lord, he died of a disease as sudden as the plague, on his way to Rome, three days are gone," said Migueloto, in a tone of hypocritical sorrow.

"He was no friend of mine ; and I regret only that he did not die coming from some other quarter than my camp," returned Cæsar. "I'll warrant me—because the man was always eating melons—they will say I poisoned him ! But at all events, tell me better news of my dear friend, Monsignor Agnelli, archbishop of Cosenza, clerk of the chamber, and vice-legate of Viterbo ?"

"The morning I left Rome he was found dead in his bed, after eating a most hearty supper !" said Migueloto, laughing outright.

"Alas, poor man, that was sudden ! but such holy men are always ready for their calls," said Cæsar, smiling too. "Alas ! and what part has my father assigned me in his relics ?"

"'Tis to be spent, I hear, on the ceremonies of your reception, and in those of the holy week," said Don Migueloto. "But I marvel your highness has never once inquired after your royal wife."

"Doth she still live then, being in Rome ?" said Cæsar, carelessly.

"I have not heard of her death, my lord !" replied Don Migueloto, somewhat startled.

"Why, then, no doubt she is still alive ; and Donna Fiamma must be singularly out of spirits with this

marriage of mine," continued Cæsar, with a degree of agitation which was visible even in the unconcerned manner which he knew so well how to assume.

"Your grace indeed should have seen her when, six months ago, I delivered her your letter from France, announcing the marriage," said Don Migueloto, with a slight shudder, which, in a man of his steely nature, was of no ordinary significance.

"What! did she stamp and rave like any other deserted drab?" said Cæsar, smiling scornfully.

"Signor, she spoke not a word for many minutes, but looked fixedly at me, and her face grew white as lightning, and writhed into the very likeness of the Medusa in the Capitol!" replied Don Migueloto. "At last she sighed such a sigh that it seemed as if her heart were reft in twain; and yet she shed but one tear—as large and heavy as a drop of molten lead—wiped it disdainfully away, and gave me a rich ring, as she said, for my good news; and then she laughed, said it was a fair day, and that the sun shone very brightly for a wedding—and so fell senseless on the ground!"

"I am quits with her now, indeed, for that matter of Sultan Zem!" said Cæsar, hurriedly.

"Nay, my lord, I must needs think your highness was jealous there on small occasion," replied Don Migueloto, in a timorous and insinuating tone.

"Perchance!—perchance I think even as thou dost; but, thou knowest not how excellent it is to have an answer ready for an upbraiding woman!" returned the Borgia. "And thou shalt see how easily, with a few honeyed words, and lying protestations,

these foolish souls will believe where they love ! She will weep and rage at first ; but at last will ruffle down like a sea after the storm, when the sun breaks out—for love in a woman's breast, even in its fury, is at worst but the sun murky with a tempest. The violence of its own winds will tear open a way to the golden light, and then is all but the sweeter and calmer for the past frenzy. But peace awhile—this is a fair scene beneath our feet."

It was, indeed, a fair scene ; for the travellers had now reached an elevation between the lofty mountains that form the valley of the Nar, which, projecting beyond their vast bases, overlooked the plains of the Tiber. The valley immediately below was filled with a dense forest, beyond which the famous river wound like a monstrous golden serpent, with its yellow folds gleaming at intervals through the rank verdure of the stagnant marshes which bordered it. At the base of the hill upon which they stood were visible the naked columns and shattered porticoes of some Roman ruins, gleaming red in the sultry light. Beyond the river extended a vast savannah, grazed by herds of buffaloes, whose large carcasses were sometimes nearly covered by the rank grass of the marshes ; a range of violet-coloured mountains terminated the view to the north ; to the south extended a vast plain, bounded only by the silver line of the sea ; and immediately in front,—still at a great distance, although from the purity of the atmosphere it seemed almost beneath the point of view,—shone a broad lake of the purest celestial blue, set in a basin of woody hills, the highest of which had the town of Ronciglione at its base,

above which arose the massive towers and battlements of its Gothic castle.

“Yonder is Nepi!” said Don Migueloto, checking his horse, and pointing to the left of the tract of country just described, where, on the summit of a craggy eminence, shot high into the air the silvery pinnacles of the ancient cathedral.

“What penance doth she at Nepi? Is it akin to the pilgrimage of my Lady Isabel Visconti, on her vow to St. Mark of Venice, which was so pleasantly spent that on her return she was obliged to poison her husband to preserve his peace from tale-bearers?” said Cæsar, after a moment’s pause of gloomy thought.

“Nay, for the rigid Dominican directs it,” replied Migueloto. “A man who would whip Venus herself at a cart-tail, and rebuke Diana for forwardness.”

“Ay, the Dominican! if I thought that she valued this Orsino so far as to have sent him on the errand which he executed, no circumstances of policy should prevail on me to spare him!” said the Borgia. “I must win some light on this matter; but, meanwhile—yonder they are crossing the bridge—we must clearly decide on what we have to do, for an order understood is half obeyed.”

Leaving the Italian chieftain and his confederate to form their plans, we rejoin the cavalcade in the plain, at a moment when, crossing the river, the canon exclaimed, in a fit of poetical and learned delight,—

“Vides ut alta stet nive candidum
Soracte!”

and, pointing to the mountain, which shone in the

brightness of the horizon like a prodigious mound of frosted silver, he translated the lines for the benefit of his un-Horatian hearers : “ Behold how, white with snow, Soracte towers !”

“ Sant’ Oreste !” repeated the soldiery, and every head was instantly bared in homage to the supposed saint.

“ No, no, my brothers !” said the canon, somewhat confused. “ But ’tis all one, for if I may credit the short shadows of the poplars, it is noonday, and, consequently, the hour of the Ave Maria against the Turks, which we will all say together.” So saying, he stopped his mule, clasped his hands, and looking up to the hot blue sky, fervently chanted half-a-dozen invocations to Our Lady for protection against, not only the Turks, but all enemies far and near, in which the canon most fervently but secretly included the whole Borgia dynasty. A bright golden cloud which hovered over the military devotees, to a poetical eye might have seemed a throne, from whence the Virgin Queen of heaven listened to her suppliants.

“ And now, benedicite, my children, and heartily on, for I trust we shall none of us live to see the church wronged in my person, or in those of the pious pilgrims my companions !” said Messer Bembo, assuming much comfort from the reverence with which the soldiers followed his religious guidance. But at this moment Don Migueloto approached, disencumbered of his late companion on the crupper, and directed the march of the escort from the main road over a dismal volcanic waste, diversified at far intervals with cities and monasteries, perched as it seemed

on inaccessible summits. A wavy succession of hills, on which the sun shone white with excessive heat, terminated the view in every direction.

The bright verdure of the vegetation which overspread the swamp concealed its pestilential depths, which the sulphurous miasma it sent forth betrayed. The incessant croaking of frogs, the green glister of lizards, darting out of their coverts, the shrill cries of moorfowl, revealed the treachery of that lustrous verdure. But at last even that false luxuriance vanished; a black plain, furrowed all over with streams of lava, which ages of time had not effaced, spread before them. Then appeared a still blacker forest, which climbed the side of a mountain in front, and looked like hearse-plumes waving to the sky, against the radiance of the now westering sun.

The aspect of the country was not such as was likely to diminish the sinister forebodings of the Orsino; but Ser Niccolò himself seemed to take fright, for he talked of resuming his direct way to Rome. A short conference with Don Migueloto either allayed or overruled his apprehensions, and the whole cavalcade finally entered the forest, which wound upwards with great steepness along lofty layers of crags. Abysses of forest soon appeared on every side, ancient as the mountain itself, the trees so gnarled and intertwined at times that light could not penetrate, and seeming as if struggling together in inextricable conflict into the ravines below. Strange gleams of red light pierced at intervals; the howlings of unseen wild beasts were audible; the cries of ill-omened birds; and yet the ferocity of man was as

usual more direful than that of nature. On reaching the summit of the mountain, and commencing the descent on the opposite side, the road was skirted with oak trees of extraordinary majesty; on every twelfth one of which, for the space of sixty, hung the carcass of a man! These unfortunate persons seemed by their garbs to be serfs belonging to some chieftain, who had been pleased to brand their right arms with a cross.

The jester had again rejoined Migueloto, who was now in advance of his prisoners; and after a moment's careless glance at the carcasses which poisoned the air with the scents of decomposition, he inquired for what and by whom they had been thus suspended.

"By Don Remiro, for the love of the Colonnas!" replied the malignant captain of Ronciglione. "Yonder is the fortress of Agapit Colonna, which, in defiance of his lordship's order to the contrary, and your sworn determination, he persisted in secretly furnishing with provisions and men of his vassalage. Whereupon, refusing to undertake a siege without danger or difficulty, the podestà sent him word that until he submitted to receive your garrison, he would hang one of his thralls every day, until not a living soul remained to till his lands. And so he proceeded,—and as Agapit continues obstinate, heaven knows what the end may be!"

"The villain! he but spares the castle for the sake of his wife's kinship!" said Cæsar fiercely. "Had he slaughtered a hundred nobles I could sooner have forgiven it than the murder of these stalwart knaves! What is the use of these dead bodies to me!"

“The podestà is indeed a bloodthirsty butcher!” said Migueloto.

“He is indeed!” returned Cæsar, in a milder and somewhat regretful accent. “And I will be convinced of his treachery ere I deprive myself of so valuable a minister! Thy device is too violent, Migueloto mine!—neither imagine that I will make thee podestà in his room, for I need thee elsewhere, and mean to govern the poor people so that they shall take a singular love for me! But, saidst thou not that he carries on his traitorous correspondence with my enemies in Rome, by means of carrier-pigeons?”

Migueloto stretched his gaunt neck round, to observe that no one was near, and then replied, “Nay, my lord, I said—with his fair wife, Beatrice Colonna.”

“When thou hast informed Don Remiro that I desire him to keep the Orsino till he hears further from me, and that I have gone on secretly to Rome, if he be the traitor thou wouldst have me think him, he will send his pigeons with the news!” said Cæsar. “Now, when thou hast privily admitted me to the castle, I will sit and watch his doings in the tower of the winds, with my good hawk, Gorebec, that never failed, on my wrist! I trust that thou hast kept him well fleshed?”

Even Migueloto stared in astonishment at this subtle and strange device; but he had no time to offer objections, even if he intended any. The report of a cannon suddenly awakened all the echoes of the

lake, towards whose golden expanse they were now descending. The direction of the sound, and the smoke which arose on the stilly evening air, announced that the castle had caught sight of their approach, and was inclined to receive them with unusual honours. This opinion was confirmed when, at the entrance of a deep glen, the crags above which were crowned with an endless succession of towers and battlements, a group of persons appeared, as if assembled to await the arrival. Cæsar exchanged a few more words with his captain, and then, with one of his fantastic gambols, disappeared from the train.

Don Migueloto hastened on, and soon came up to the group in anxious expectation, which was composed of Spanish soldiers, like those of the escort, excepting one personage, who was mounted on a snow-white mule, and was attired in the black-furred mantle and cap of a doctor of laws, his rank of *podestà* marked only by a gold chain which hung to his feet. A lean and shrivelled body, a visage furrowed all over with the lines of thought and care, long hair prematurely grey, an expression sinister and troubled, a frown quivering with nervous emotion and restlessness, like a loadstone in the box, composed the personal attributes of the merciless administrator of the law.

Don Migueloto requested to speak with the *podestà* in private; and together they proceeded down the glen, until their figures were darkened under the shadows of the huge black rocks upon which the castle was built, and of the woods above; the brawl

of a stream which fell through a distant archway in the walls, and rattled through the ravine, rendering their voices inaudible at a distance.

The podestà had undoubtedly been the dupe of the message brought on the previous night by the African runner; and he heard with surprise and alarm, which distorted his wiry features in the struggle to seem calm—that the duke had met Migueloto at Narni, in disguise, and directed him to proceed instantly to the rescue of the Lord Paolo. That his highness was not displeased with the obstacles the podestà had thrown in the way of that baron's destruction, traitor as he was, since he had heard the ill news from Milan, of which doubtless the podestà had been informed. But the duke still thought it expedient to have Signor Paolo detained until he found how matters stood in Rome, whither he had secretly hastened. He therefore ordered him to keep the Orsino at Ronciglione until he had news from himself at Rome; by fair means, if possible, but at all events to detain him.

CHAPTER XI.

FEUDAL GOVERNMENT.

“What is this world ? what axen men to have ?
Now with his love, now in the colde grave
Alone, withouten any compaignie.”

CHAUCER.

THE practised features of the judge resumed their equanimity during this oration ; not that his inward trouble had at all abated, but the habit of dissimulation returned. Migueloto then calmly added that the duke had so contrived it, that one of his servants, disguised as a monk, had revealed the place of the Orsino's confinement to some pilgrims, who had rescued him. This information somewhat appeased the doubts in the podestà's mind, and he replied with humility, that his supreme joy and duty were to obey his generous master. At the same time his eye fell with searching suspicion and uneasiness on the crafty features of his officer, whose hatred and ambition were probably more than guessed by him. But the rest of the cavalcade approached, and the escort halting, opened a pathway lined with spears for the advance of the personages whom they guarded.

The podestà returned, observing with surprise the

number and quality of these leaders—but recognising the Orsino, he dismounted to receive him, a courtesy which the Roman baron instantly returned. They met accordingly on foot, and with all the formal ceremonial of the age, kissing each other on both cheeks. The podestà warmly congratulated the young baron on his escape from the banditti, who, he had heard with extreme grief and confusion, had ventured, even under his own immediate jurisdiction, to seize on his illustrious person, and put it to ransom !

“ Let us not speak of that ; our Black Bands have, in man’s memory, assailed even the person of an emperor,” returned the baron. “ But I am safe now, and under the friendly escort of my rescuers ; and the way to Rome is not easily missed over the Campagna. Therefore, my lord podestà, but for my joy to see you in such excellent health, I am sorry you have brought me thus far to the west, and must make up for lost time by abridging the pleasure of this interview, for I mean to lodge to night at Sutri or Nepi.”

“ My lord, as you perceive by the length of the rays over the hills, it is nigh sunset,” replied the podestà in a resolved and even stern voice. “ The road you speak of is through fen and forest and wastes : your horses are spent ; so are those of my troopers ; moreover, signor, I have no warrant to permit a lord, so well known to be in rebellion against the church, to proceed to Rome. Therefore, I must humbly implore and beseech your lordship to take up

your lodging at Ronciglione, until I can obtain his Holiness's commands."

"Mean you, sir podestà, that you will force me to delay thus on my road, bearing as I do the articles of a fair peace?" said the baron, passionately.

"I must do my duty, noble sir," replied the podestà, with a look of much significance. "And the time will come when your lordship will see that I am, and have been, your truest friend."

"And the husband of a Colonna!" exclaimed Paolo.

"The Colonnas love the Orsini little, but they love others less," replied the podestà, slightly smiling at the pleasant recollection of his young wife.

"Our Holy Father himself invited me to Rome, and I will only enter these towers under sway of the strong hand!" replied the Orsino. "These my friends will stand by me!—and you shall perpetrate my murder under the gaze of Italy, which sees all you do through the eyes of yonder gentleman, the ambassador of Florence."

"Health to the serene and magnificent signory," said the podestà, uncovering and bending profoundly to the dignitary who represented them; and his gloomy visage cleared up wonderfully as he added, "I cannot but offer the same hospitality to your company, signor; and if it be true that you have his Holiness's invitation, why dread you the slight delay which is necessary to bring me the confirmation from Rome?"

"Promise then, sir podestà, that the Lord Paolo

shall not be separated from us, his friends ; and that when we depart from Ronciglione, he shall accompany us," said the Hospitaller.

To this proposal the magistrate assented with great readiness ; and as in fact resistance was impossible, the travellers were fain to accept the slender guarantee which it tendered.

The unwilling guests now proceeded on the way up to the fortress-gates, Machiavelli smiling vaguely ; for in truth he himself was uncertain as to what was to happen, but felt that it would be mischief. The immense extent and strength of the castle appeared more plainly as the windings of the crags in the ascent revealed its towers and battlements stretching remotely in every direction. It might almost be considered as a double castle : for above the first circles of Gothic fortifications arose a pile in the Saracenic style, and of a whiter stone, in the centre of which was a round tower of extraordinary height, which, being pierced with horse-shoe embrasures on every side, was popularly called the Tower of the Winds.

The interior of the castle, however, shadowed forth some of the great changes of the time ; for, although preserving the warlike characteristics of a feudal castle in other particulars, traces of that magnificence and love of the arts which had arisen in Italy appeared even in the stronghold of the ferocious Borgia. The apartments allotted to the guests were furnished with great magnificence, perhaps with a barbarous profusion of gilding and ornament ; and the great saloon, in which a repast was served shortly after

their arrival, instead of being as usual hung with uncouth designs in arras, was painted in fresco by some masterhand. The vessels from which they were to eat and drink were of silver, and already forks of one prong were used in partaking of the viands.

The knights had refused to unarm, alleging that it was part of their pilgrim vow to remain in steel; but the canon was much comforted to observe that, although waited on by the soldiers of the castle, the English men-at-arms were served at a lower table in the same apartment. Gratified with this proof of the absence of any immediate treachery, the epicurean ecclesiastic watched with satisfaction the preparations for a noble banquet which began to load the tables. Some beakers of choice red wine had removed the sense of fatigue; and while Messer Bembo's good wit was cheered and sharpened by frequent encounters with that of the Florentine ambassador, his eye was charmed with the superb view which the saloon commanded. The lake of Vico lay almost immediately below in its woody amphitheatre, beyond which arose the distant snowy piles of the Ciminian Alp. The forests which clothed the opposite hills were shot with the scarlet effulgence of the sunset, while the waters of the lake had subsided into deep sombre purple, excepting where the direct line of the sun crossed them in a column of wavering gold. The air was wooingly sweet and balmy, with the scent of odoriferous herbs and flowers; and the only animated objects which disturbed the Eden-like solitude were the snowy swans which glided majestically over the bosom of the lake.

At last the table seemed sufficiently furnished : wild boars roasted whole, noble haunches of venison, pasties whose vast walls inclosed every species of game, fish in profusion, and above all, an enormous roasted crane, composed the staple viands. Nought was wanting but the presence of the host himself, who had retired, said Captain Migueloto, to write some despatches. The canon gazed hungrily and unpoetically at the table, and thence with a sigh to the lake. He was just remembering somewhat vacantly the beautiful legend which appertains to its waters, as well as to so many other European lakes—that a submerged city is frequently beheld by fishermen below its bright depths, when his attention was caught by observing a pigeon, with something white tied round its neck, dart from a tower above. The bird flew at first in a straight and steady line towards the south, but suddenly it whirled round, panting rather than flying with its wings, and dived down to the lake.

Bembo's curiosity was excited, and looking upward, it was some moments before he discerned a hawk so high in the air that it looked little more than a black spot. But it was descending in its fatal gyrations, and as if aware of an inevitable doom, the pigeon, after a few vain flutterings, made a last despairing soar, and soon the rapacious claws were in its back, and the ruthless beak in its brain.

The canon had no time to notice what further befell the unhappy bird, for at this moment the much desired podestà made his appearance. He entered, but with so much agitation and anger visible in his coun-

tenance, that Bembo's alarms were all renewed. "Who is it, Migueloto, that presumes to fly the duke's hawks without my allowance?" he said, fiercely. "I have just lost one of my best carrier pigeons, which was seized by a hawk launched from the Tower of Winds, and the letter to my wife, which I despatched by it, is probably lost!"

"It is Uguccione. I have warned him many a time that he displeased your lordship," replied Don Migueloto. "But the hawks are too well trained to have eaten the pigeon; therefore undoubtedly the letter is safe."

"Go and bring the rogue this instant before me; and, by heaven! if the seal is but breathed upon, I will have him hung up as a warning to all such insolent, meddling villains that keep no discipline," said the podestà, whose agitation was so extreme that Ser Niccolò inwardly smiled. Don Migueloto departed, apparently with very good will, on his errand; and striving to resume his equanimity, Remiro invited the guests to seat themselves. Some time elapsed, and although the podestà continued to be much disturbed, the guests did ample honour to their repast. The Orsino, for whatever reason, ate only of such meats as he saw were served to his host; but no one had as yet assailed the crane when the captain of Ronciglione made his re-appearance. His naturally insidious and at the same time ferocious countenance displayed its characteristics now so legibly, that a child could not have mistaken them. He held an open letter in his hand, which he presented to the podestà. "It was not the under-falconer, as I imagined, my lord,"

he said, with a satanic leer, "but a fellow that lately came to the castle, who has dared to amuse himself with flying the duke's hawks ; and whom I surprised perusing your letter to Signora Donna Beatrice, your honourable wife !"

"My wife !—then—thou hast not—thou hast not read it too, Migueloto ?" exclaimed the podestà, turning deadly pale as he received the epistle.

"Your lordship knows that I am as great a fool in monk-learning as a monk were in soldiery !" replied Migueloto.

"True—that thou hast often said !" observed the podestà, breathing hard, as if relieved from a weight on his chest. "But did not this prying villain read it to thee ?"

"By the rood ! I gave him not the time !" replied the captain.

"What, my excellent, my faithful Migueloto ! thou didst not, in thy passion at his insolence, strike thy dagger into him ?" said Don Remiro, hurriedly.

"I caused him to be instantly seized—but I thought it behoved me rather to wait for your lordship's judgment," said the captain.

"Where have you left him ? In whose company ? Take him at once to the nearest tree !" said the podestà, with increasing agitation. "Doubtless he is some spy employed by our enemies—else wherefore should he read my letters ?"

"My lord, he is a freeman, and as such, according to the laws of that same Roman king you so often upbraid us with, he must be fairly adjudged ere he be

put to death," replied the malicious captain, who enjoyed his superior's confusion.

"Let none speak to him. Bring him here gagged, and I will adjudge him fast enough," said Don Remiro, passionately.

"He is at the door—your lordship need not long delay your dinner," said Don Migueloto, stepping eagerly to the portal, which he threw widely open. The burnished casques and spears of the Florentine ambassador's escort suddenly glittered on the startled gaze of the banquetters, filing into the saloon in rapid succession, from the centre of whose opening ranks, with a rapid and fiery step, eyes blazing with wrath, his fine nostrils quivering, his cheek pale with concentrated passion, came Cæsar Borgia! The suddenness of his entry, his wild looks, his dark hair waving like black serpents beneath his cap of white fur—even his garb, which was of sable velvet gleaming all over with gems—might have struck terror into men who had no reason to dread his wrath. As it was, Don Remiro stood fixed and pallid as stone—the knights started up and laid their hands on their swords, and the canon broke into the form of exorcism to a fiend.

"Ha, podestà! you are determined then to send me to the gibbet for impertinence!—What then does treason merit?" thundered the terrific master; and turning with a sudden change to the most courtly and blandishing kindness, he said, "Disturb not at this, noble gentlemen, and my dear friend and brother, Orsino!—But assist me to pronounce what

punishment is due to this ungrateful traitor, who is not content with endeavouring to blow into a more furious flame than ever this civil war which we were all striving to extinguish, but desires to blacken my good name with the foulest treachery; to raise not only Rome but all humanity against me, yea, even to set war, and hatred, and suspicion between a father and his child !”

As he spoke, he snatched the paper from the passive hand of the podestà, and read aloud the intercepted letter to his no less passive auditors.

The podestà had indeed been inspired by his evil genius when he penned this epistle. After a loving preamble to his fair wife, and intense regrets expressed at their long separation, Don Remiro cooingly declared that he believed the time of their mutual misery was drawing to a close. He then informed the lady of the arrival of Paolo Orsino and his company at Ronciglione; described the calamities he had suffered on the way; and desired her immediately on the receipt of this letter to hasten to the Apostolic Palace, use the signal he had taught her to obtain a private audience of the Pope, and then to inform his holiness of the event; with the addition, that the podestà knew the whole to have been plotted by the Duke of Romagna to murder his intended brother-in-law, and that unless speedy rescue arrived, the deed would still be accomplished ! To prevent which, he advised that the Pope should send a nuncio, with his command to the podestà to bring the Orsino instantly to Rome; and lest the soldiery and seditious captain of Ronciglione should

refuse obedience, he advised that the nuncio should be accompanied by the German ordnance and a muster of the Orsini, allowing them, by way of security, the guard of the Flaminian Gate, until their return. In a private postscript, the uxorious magistrate informed his wife, that as he could no longer live apart from her, and as the duke began to suspect his attachment to the service of his holiness, and was moreover more rapacious than a harpy, cruel than a tiger, and false than a serpent, he did not intend to return to his office, and therefore desired her to send three large carriages, with broad wheels, to convey away his treasures and effects, before the tyrant could arrive. Among the latter was a pearl chain, of the bigness of pigeon eggs, taken from a certain lady of Montefeltro, who was executed for blasphemously pretending to miraculous powers in foretelling events—among which she had dared to include the podestà's approaching destruction,—which he hoped soon to see on the fairest neck in the world.

“Now gentlemen and true knights, deem you the lady of the pigeon-egg pearls ought to be mistaken?” said the Borgia, with a terrible laugh as he concluded reading the epistle.

“If Don Remiro has spoken the truth in this amorous overflow, wherefore would you punish him, Duke of Romagna?” said the Hospitaller, whether in desperation or defiance, he himself could scarcely have said. But instead of being irritated to madness, as the unhappy canon immediately expected to behold him, Cæsar's fierce eyes suffused with tears,

and he uttered, in a voice apparently choked with grief, touching laments over the severity of his fortune which exposed him to such undeserved suspicions. "You too, Paolo, you too, suspected me, else wherefore did you journey by stealth through my estates?" he said, with a pathetic look of reproach which almost deceived the Orsino himself. "But our blessed Mother be praised! I can give a noble answer to these calumnies of my enemies and traitors! Are you not here in my power, in my strong castle, which Orsini and German ordnance might vainly assail for years—surrounded by my devoted soldiery? Well!—to thee, Paolo, I offer the fullest and amplest confirmation of all the terms of the peace which we concluded at Imola,—to all of you a friendly welcome, safe lodging and good cheer,—and to-morrow, with the dawn, we will all troop in company to Rome, where you shall share such honours as the too liberal state will needs heap upon me!"

He extended his hand at the same time with seeming enthusiasm to the Orsino, who looked at him for a moment in doubt, as he replied, "Do you then consent to cement our alliance in the way so oft proposed?—Say yes, Cæsar!—fulfil your promise of setting us free, and my doubts are gone for ever!"

"On that one point Donna Lucrezia herself must decide, and your own fortune in love," replied the duke composedly.

"But you will no longer use your influence in favour of the Prince of Ferrara?" returned the

Orsino, with lingering incredulity expressed in his every tone.

“Ha, ha, what say you, when the vain simpleton has crossed the Alps to shun an alliance which an emperor might rejoice in?” replied Cæsar, with a momentary expression of mortified pride. “But why keep we the privy councillor of our holy father standing?—away with him, Migueloto!”

“Mercy, my lord, my master, my glorious and victorious prince!—mercy to a wretched criminal!” yelled the podestà, prostrating himself on the rushes strewed over the floor.

“Mercy, merciless traitor!—what mercy didst thou show to the lady with the chain of pigeon-egg pearls?” replied Cæsar, spurning the wretched man with his foot as he endeavoured to clasp his knees. Migueloto darted forward and seized the podestà by his fur mantle, but Paolo Orsino now interposed. “However falsely, treacherously, and ungratefully this man has behaved to you, Cæsar, still it is not for me to forget that he shewed a concern for my safety, though doubtless of a misjudging and selfish cast. Therefore, I pray you, do not at least inflict upon him—death!”

“I would humbly propose, my lord, that he be delivered bound to the people whom he governed—to the wives and children of the serfs whom we found hanging on the green oaks above,” said Machiavelli, in a mild and interceding tone.

“So let it be!” said Cæsar, joyously. “And when they have done with him, saw me his carcass in twain, and set it up like a shark’s jaw in the

market-place, to let the people know that I loved not nor approve his cruelties ! ”

At this terrific sentence, all vestiges of sense deserted the wretched magistrate, and he reeled back into the arms of Don Migueloto. It is probable that the recollection of the direful cruelties of the podestà, which they had so lately witnessed, somewhat cooled the zeal of the intercessors on his behalf. Moreover, Migueloto rushed upon his victim with the avidity of a wild beast, fearful lest its prey should be snatched from it, and hurried him out. But Messer Niccolò, when he found his advice, which was given rather in satirical bitterness than in earnestness, so fearfully taken, besought Cæsar to revoke his sentence. At first his entreaties produced no effect, but when he pointed out the danger of suffering the people to tear their tyrant to pieces, the duke consented that a messenger should be sent to countermand the order for the execution, and to convey the criminal to a dungeon beneath the castle. “And there let him muse at his leisure on his wife’s fair neck, and the large pearls that are to deck it,” said the humorous tyrant; and throwing himself with a lofty air into the raised seat so lately occupied by the fallen podestà, he filled a goblet of wine to the brim, and with a smile which seemed full of joviality and heartiness, drank to the health of all his honoured guests, and of his dear brother, the Orsino, in particular.

CHAPTER XII.

A FEUDAL PEACE.

“ Why, I can smile, and murder while I smile,
And cry, content, to that which grieves my heart,
And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
And frame my face to all occasions.”—SHAKESPERE.

AFTER this ceremonial it seemed as if, for the first time, that Cæsar noticed specifically the presence of the Florentine ambassador. He embraced him warmly. “ In happy hour are we all met ! ” he said. “ For now your magnificent lords may clearly learn how unfounded are their suspicions that my peace with the Orsini must needs include some harm to their states. Yourself shall witness the truth to them ! Migueloto ! where is he ? Ah, true : let some one bring me my steel strong-box.”

Half-a-dozen soldiers darted off immediately on this service, and returned with a massive chest, which the Hospitaller had some faint idea he had noticed among the baggage of Ser Niccolò. A vast parchment was produced, which Cæsar himself read in a loud and distinct, and at the same time musical voice. This document remains one of the most singular monuments of that tempestuous age. It pro-

vided for the restoration of the dispossessed barons to all their ancient powers and dominions, with such exceptions as the harmonious hatred of the contracting parties sometimes agreed upon. The Colonna were of the number; but the multitude of the restored barons, their hard Gothic names barbarously Latinized, mark how feeble must have been the sovereignty which was to be acknowledged to the Holy See by these turbulent feudatories. Still it was a vast advantage, overlooked by the colleagues, which was bestowed on the church by their consent to a general surrender of all fiefs held by them under grants of the emperors, on condition that they should be instantly restored by the pontiff as his own. This stipulation conferred on the church all rights of suzerainty,—among the rest that of compelling them to serve it in arms, which the barons were content to concede, in the belief that their restored power would enable them to despise that of their new master. No other state of Italy was mentioned in the stipulations, either in a hostile or friendly spirit; so that none could apparently take umbrage.

“I am willing to these conditions—but, alas, I shall remain but a shadowy duke!” said Cæsar, with a quaint smile.

“Surely, my lords, there should be some hostage, some pledge for the due observance of this peace, which is else but scrawled deerskin!” said the Hospitaller, in his deep, austere tones; and fixing his gaze on Cæsar, he continued—“Since it appears

that our holy father desires these nuptials, wherefore do ye not solemnly covenant to bind your loves in adamant by wedding the heir of the Orsini to the lady of the Borgias ?”

“ Will Messer Bembo, so fresh from Ferrara, put his hand to this good stipulation ?” said Ser Nicolò, with evident alarm at the proposal. “ Or will your highness bind yourself to exercise what may perchance prove a tyrannous control over that beautiful lady’s likings ?”

“ The Lord Paolo had time while I was in France, I have heard, to prove her likings,” replied Cæsar, with a piercing look at Paolo. “ If, brother, thou canst truly aver that she showed thee any buddings of hope, I will do even as this warlike peace-maker would have us !”

The Orsino’s countenance darkened, and in almost exact proportion that of Cæsar irradiated.

“ I am not of those disloyal cavaliers who are wont to boast their lady’s gentleness into her shame,” he replied with a gloomy smile. “ Let us leave that matter to time and fortune, and the warmth of a passion which might enforce a returning glow in the bosom of a statue moulded like St. Cyprian’s in snow.”

Cæsar made no reply, but snatched a pen from a vast leaden stand which one of the notaries attached to the podestà’s train came bearing in trembling humility. He was about to sign, when Don Migueloto re-entered with a fiendish smile, which he vainly strove to conceal under a forced sadness of aspect.

Glancing at his familiar's countenance, the duke observed, "My countermand arrived then too late?" and wrote his name in huge capitals.

"Signor, before he had reached the gates, a soldier, whose brother he once hanged, ripped him up with his dagger," replied Migueloto composedly.

"Then it will not hurt him to saw him in twain; so let it be done incontinently," replied the duke.

"It is done, my lord; 'tis astonishing how dexterous with the saw Zeid is!" said the captain.

"Ha! and what say the people?" continued Cæsar, calmly. "Have you set him up in the market-place?"

"The dead lion scares them; they have left their melons and olives to the care of the baskets, and the square is empty—but I saw some women creeping in again, so they will soon be as thick as the carrion-flies about it," said Migueloto, laughing at the ludicrous recollection of the flight of the peasants.

"Go and wash thine hands, Migueloto! Not that I mean thee for my cup-bearer," replied Cæsar. "And that minds me—where is Astor Manfredi, whom I raised to that noble office at my last sojourn?"

"I shall find him, I warrant; he leaves his chamber but seldom, signor," said Don Migueloto, with his crafty leer.

"Then now let us give a loose to mirth and festivity," said Cæsar joyously. "Let the soldiers tap a butt of my noblest Sicilian; send couriers to Rome, announcing this excellent peace and our approach; also to the Vitelli and to Bologna; and in

especial to my good friend, Giovanni Frangiani, of Fermo."

"Signor, you have not then heard of the chance that has befallen that ancient gentleman?" said the canon, timidly. "We heard it on our pilgrimage from Ferrara."

"Is he at last gone peaceably, as he hath lived, to his ancestors?" said Ser Niccolò.

"Nay, sirs, but he is foully and treacherously murdered by his sister's son, whom he brought up from an infant, and treated ever as his own!" said the Knight of St. John. "Under pretext of paying his uncle a loving visit during this latter truce, he introduced himself into Fermo, and slaughtered the good old man in the midst of a banquet which he gave to welcome him!"

"Oliverotto is a friend and ally of thine, Orsino, and a pupil of the Vitelli," observed Cæsar, demurely.

"Let him now apply himself to doing good to the commons, or I take it he will not long be sovereign in Fermo," said Ser Niccolò thoughtfully, ruminating as if studying in his prolific brain the means to support so direful an usurpation.

At this moment Don Migueloto made his re-appearance with a bustling retinue, bearing the materials for a much more sumptuous banquet than that which had been interrupted. Some of the men-at-arms bore a canopy of crimson and gold, under which the podestà was wont to administer justice, which they arranged as a state over their chieftain. Migueloto himself came leading, or rather dragging, a

figure, whose woe-begone aspect immediately attracted the gaze of the canon. It was that of a youth scarcely eighteen years old, whose form and countenance had once been of perfect beauty; but whose sunken eyes now glared with a mixture of idiocy and madness—despair, rage, and yet vacancy—inexpressibly affecting and terrible. He had obviously been dressed up hastily for exhibition, and his splendid garb hung about his wasted frame in bags; and yet it had exactly fitted that once Apollo-like form, when in the flush of youth and bravery he had defended during a year his inheritance of the city of Faenza against Cæsar Borgia. What had been his subsequent fate? Was it the misfortunes of his house and imprisonment only which had wrought this ruin?

“Jupiter himself has not a nobler cup-bearer than mine; and in truth I carried him away on the back of my eagles!” said the Borgia, who had not yet perceived the entry of his cup-bearer. “It pleases me to see the proud boy serve me, pouting and beautiful with disdain—for he forsooth would be a soldier, and mar his bright complexion in the sun! Why, Migueloto, what goblin is this?”

“It is the Lord Manfredi; but he hath been so closely pent up by the podestà’s orders, who fancied that he meant to escape!”—said Don Migueloto, when Cæsar interrupted him by exclaiming fiercely, “To escape!—how to escape, when I had promised to use my every effort to obtain his restoration and the grace of our holy father!”

"To escape—to join your highness in your warfare," replied Migueloto, in confusion.

"Six months have wondrously changed him," said Cæsar, gazing at his miserable victim, with perhaps a momentary feeling of remorse, for there was a touch of compassion in the tones which seemed to arouse some recollection and consciousness in the poor idiot. Tears began to flow fast from his hollow eyes, and he uttered a long piteous whine like the cry of a beaten hound.

"Remove him: let him be looked to—I will send mediciners from Rome!" said Cæsar. "But how comes it, Migueloto, that I see ne'er a face without a beard among you? There were some as smooth as peaches when I was last in Ronciglione."

"He that is in halves now made short work among them one morning, my lord," replied Migueloto, grimly smiling. "He had his fits of justice, as he called it; but let us not speak evil of the dead! Natheless, if your grace pleases, I will take a dozen spears, and bring you a few of the prettiest girls in the market-place. They are not all baked brown."

"If any violence beintended to women, Duke Cæsar, it is both in my rule of knighthood and religion—to battle him to death who dares to offer it!" said the Hospitaller, rising and directing his fierce gaze on Migueloto, as he clasped the hilt of his heavy sword.

"Peace to your valour, sir knight! but I also am of the noble order of chivalry, by the hand of a king,—therefore am equally bound to protect the weak—and what is weaker than woman?" said Cæsar,

smiling with bitter irony, and playing at the same time with the golden doves of an order which he wore on his neck. He then made a sign to Migueloto, who immediately retired with the young Manfredi.

During the revelry which ensued, the Hospitaller alone continued gloomy and silent, scarcely mingling at all in the dialogue, or partaking of the viands. The impression which the tragical scenes they had lately witnessed seemed not to wear so soon from his mind as from the joyous and free-hearted Englishman's, or so subtly to be concealed as by the other Italians. But Cæsar's manner had in it something of fascination, when he chose to exert the fine qualities of intellect which he had so fearfully abused. The broad jest for one—for another the refined, voluptuous, or brilliant thought—the play of fancy or wit—enthusiasm, or its withering enemy, ridicule—all moods of the human mind seemed equally within the compass of the strangely Protean powers of the man. Time passed rapidly, and the night was far advanced ere Migueloto ventured to suggest, that as the duke and his guest intended to proceed to Rome on the following morning, it would be expedient to take some repose. The Orsino's countenance slightly paled at the proposal, which the keen eye of his host observed, for he said with his peculiar smile—"Tis not my intent to break any article of our late podestà's stipulations; we are all soldiers, and if heather couches are not too voluptuous for you, we will have them strewed in this chamber, so that your men-at-arms may sleep around us!"

The Orsino affected to accept this offer as dictated

by convenience ; and the lodging was so arranged. Some half-naked slaves, seamed with many a mark of lash and blow, brought in the bundles of sweet-scented heather, which they placed along the walls, one for each man. The only distinction consisted in the leaders having each a covering of bear-skins. But all commentary on the events of the day among our travellers was effectually prevented by Cæsar's apparently generous and trusting resolution to sleep with them in the saloon.

CHAPTER XIII.

“ The truth !—what is the truth ! ”

Dying words of Anne Hyde, Duchess of York.

“ — clari soboles Lucretia Borgiæ,

Pulchro ore, et pulchris æquantem moribus aut quas

Verax fama refert, aut quas sibi fabula finxit.”

ARIOSTO.

Lucretia Borgia ! equalling in beauty the most famous of antiquity ; in virtues all that truth reports, or story has feigned.

AFTER a night even more restless than the preceding one to the Orsino, the longed-for light came at last. Mass was sung—a stupendous breakfast dispatched—and as Cæsar was now undoubtedly as anxious as his guests to proceed, no time was lost in getting to the saddle ; and while the morning was still in its earliest blush, the little army passed out of Ronciglione. It was now much increased by a part of the garrison, under the command of Don Migueloto, and by continual accessions which met them, as if by appointment, on their line of advance. The majority of the latter consisted of inferior barons with their vassals, feudatories of the Holy See, but

there were also several large bodies of German cavalry. Altogether the array began to assume a very formidable appearance. Cæsar was so much occupied in receiving these chieftains, and listening to the intelligence they brought, that his guests had frequent opportunities of conversing with each other. Le Beaufort, with the frank generosity of his character, already began to entertain a more favourable opinion of the duke, and he laughed at a suspicion which it seemed Paolo had imbibed—that the zany, their late companion, who had mysteriously disappeared, was Cæsar Borgia himself! It is true that he but hinted this fancy, and strove to throw an air of incredulity into his words; but the canon and the Knight of St. John seemed to be of his opinion. The former tremulously endeavoured to recollect all that he had said and done in the Carthusian monastery; while Paolo laboured to convince himself that Cæsar could not have been in the plot against him, since it was improbable that he would quietly look on to see it frustrated.

They were now traversing the vast plain of the Campagna, then as in our own times, but from a different cause, a desert of reedy grass, marshes, and forests, through which wound the sluggish Tiber. Not a trace of human habitation appeared. A few tombs and ruined columns still marked the line of the Flaminian way, else every vestige of a road had vanished.

Strong as was his escort, Cæsar quitted the direct line over the Campagna, under some pretext that the castellan of Monterosi, beneath whose walls they

must have passed, was of the Colonna faction. They accordingly left Nepi to the right, and plunged into a forest of seemingly boundless extent, and of an antiquity which vied with the oldest monuments of Italy. The noonday heat, which was extreme in the open plain, was agreeably tempered by the shadows of the enormous oaks of which the forest was chiefly composed, and by the dampness arising from the numerous swamps in its recesses.

Traversing this leafy wilderness, a sudden opening in the forest revealed a watery waste of black mud, dotted with islands of rank verdure, which stretched far towards the Lake of Bracciano. A herd of buffaloes, grazing as their wont is at some distance from each other, or wallowing in the foul marsh, were the only animated objects visible. Whether these animals were wild, and as such the prey of all who dared attempt their destruction, or were the property of some one of his numerous enemies, or that he needed their carcasses to feed his array, we know not, but Cæsar gave orders that some of the herd should be surrounded and destroyed. To effect this purpose, a body of spearmen was despatched to the skirt of the marsh, who with shouts and the goadings of their weapons were to drive the herd towards the forest, where the duke with a chosen squadron of mounted archers awaited their approach to overwhelm them with javelins and arrows. The ferocity and prodigious strength of the animals made the first part of this enterprize full of danger, and for that reason Sir Reginald insisted on accompanying the spearmen. The Knight of St. John took appa-

rently but little interest in the matter; but as it seemed, rather than remain with Cæsar in the forest, he followed at a leisurely pace the march of the spearmen.

To conceal their approach from the herd, the hunters took a circuit into the wood which skirted the marsh; and it was in following their hoof-tracks that the Hospitaller lighted on a scene which so strongly attracted his notice, that he halted to gaze upon it. He reached a point at which the forest descended into one of those deep ravines from which arise the rocks on which most of the towns of the Campagna are built. A city picturesquely built on the brow of the opposite hill, surrounded by walls, and crowned with a strong castle, appeared in some remoteness. The country around was richly cultivated, the mountain being completely covered with vines and olives, and the plain waving with corn or verdant pastures, on which fed white steers and numerous flocks of sheep. Ceres indeed seemed to have shaken her horn empty over this fortunate site, and there was such an air of pastoral tranquillity and security brooding over all, that the Hospitaller knew not how to account for such an oasis in the devastated territory.

He concluded, in his musing survey, that the land belonged to some monastery, the sanctity of which protected its possessions from spoliation; more especially as he remarked, in the ravine below, a scene of a very ecclesiastical character. From its groves of cypresses and pines arose the airy shafts of a Gothic shrine placed over a fountain, and sur-

mounted by a cross, with a figure of the Virgin kneeling and embracing it in agony, while some saint in the garb of a monk offered consolation by pointing upward. The waters of the fountain flowed from lion's heads at the top of some circular steps, on the highest of which stood a Dominican monk, preaching, apparently with great fervour, to a crowd of listeners below. Numerous groups of peasants in wild, but gaily-tinted garbs, stood or knelt around the shrine, their bronze countenances glowing with agitation and religious zeal. Many pilgrims, known by bearing the rosemary branch, were among them, and two or three soldiers were visible among the trees.

But the principal group was undoubtedly around a lady who seemed to be of high rank, for she sat in a gilded chair opposite the preacher, while several ecclesiastics, whose gorgeous robes proclaimed them to be the chapter of a cathedral, with a bishop at their head, stood around. A number of richly attired ladies were also standing, and a litter of purple silk, borne on gilded poles by slaves, might be observed at some distance. Even at the height where he was placed, the Hospitaller could not but remark the queenly grace with which the lady sat, and his curiosity was kindled when he remarked, that with all these attributes of grandeur around her, she wore a robe of the coarsest sackcloth, but which could not altogether hide the beauty of her form. Her feet were naked, and their sculpturesque whiteness was displayed on the coarse rug of black wool beneath them. The long tresses of her golden hair were

unbound, and flowed down to her waist in silky waves, and with the hand on which she leaned in penitential humility, nearly concealed her face.

This apparition was the more extraordinary, as the shrine appeared to be decked out for a festival, every fret and pinnacle of the elaborate masonry being hung with garlands of flowers. So deeply did it excite the curiosity of the religious knight, that observing an uneven path before him, which descended to the ravine, he followed it some little way, when a crashing noise mingled with shouts induced him to turn his head. He beheld an enormous black buffalo bull, with its tufted tail high in the air, as if stung to madness by gadflies, come rushing down the steep, pursued by Sir Reginald at full gallop, who was laughing and shouting in the hilarity of the chase. But he was certainly ignorant that the whole herd was on his rear, frantically following the flight of their leader, and urged on by the spearmen, who rode after them in the hope of turning their career. The Hospitaller perceived at a glance the destruction which must ensue among the defenceless multitude below, if the herd arrived while they were thus absorbed. He therefore set spurs to his horse, and galloped down the declivity, shouting "Buffaloes, buffaloes!" at the pitch of his powerful voice. A direful uproar instantly arose, more especially as, unable to check his horse on its reaching the ravine, the armed phantom dashed round the shrine, and left in full view the approach of the terrific and maddened brute. The peasants, yelling distractedly, rushed away in every direction, falling over one another in their flight; pilgrims, slaves, and

priests fled alike confusedly—all save the monk who had been preaching. When the Hospitaller brought his horse round, he perceived that the unarmed friar had rushed before the chair, from which the lady in sackcloth had risen, but had not fled, for there she stood, calling alternately to the Virgin, and on her fugitive vassals for protection, perfectly pale, but as if disdaining to share their cowardly flight. To perceive that the buffalo was rushing full tilt on the lady, that only the gaunt figure of the friar stood between her and destruction, and to dash forward with his mighty war-steed between them and the furious beast, were almost simultaneous actions with the chivalrous Hospitaller.

The buffalo was of prodigious size and strength—an African bull of the largest species, covered with black shaggy hair, its vast forehead so broad that its curled horns, which might separately have measured ten feet, could not compass it; its neck of amazing bulk; its small red eyes whirling in eddies of fire; its nose to the ground; its whole enormous strength concentrated like a battering ram, and increased by its wild velocity;—such was the assailant to which the Knight of St. John opposed himself and steed—not indeed with the insane purpose of receiving its shock, for swerving his shrilling horse with the dexterity which the practice of the bull-fight had made habitual to the Italian nobles, the Hospitaller seized the lightning instant when it rushed past, and struck one mighty blow with his axe, at the point where the spine enters the brain. The buffalo's career came to an instantaneous stop—he reeled, and simultaneously his

vast flank was pierced by Sir Reginald's spear, who arrived with such headlong impetuosity that the weapon shivered to pieces, and he himself was tossed far over the buffalo's back. But the spear pierced the beast's entrails, and with a roar of anguish which seemed to shake the ground, and tossing torrents of his black blood around him, the wretched animal fell with all his monstrous carcass, and rolled over on his back in the agonies of death. The herd that followed, dismayed at the sound, suddenly paused, and then seized with panic, turned on their pursuers. Sir Reginald sprang up but little hurt by his fall, and flew to assist his brother-in-arms. But he found him dismounted, and hastening with his hands full of water to the assistance of the lady, whom the Dominican had borne in his arms, chair and all, up the steps of the shrine—where she lay insensible.

The monk knelt supporting her in his arms, and vainly chafing her brows; but even in that moment of terror and suffering, pale and colourless as marble, the Knight of St. John was struck with a feeling of astonishment, at the extraordinary beauty of the lady's form. Her sackcloth robe, deranged in the confusion, displayed it but too liberally, and the voluptuous roundness of the outlines, and the snowy fairness of the complexion, struck the Hospitaller's imagination with a splendid though vague vision, as if he were playing Prometheus to a statue of Venus. Throwing aside his hood, he hung over the beautiful form, absorbed as intensely in his efforts to revive her, as if in reality, like the sculptor demigod, he were kindling marble into life with the stolen fire. The monk zea-

lously aided, and Sir Reginald threw himself on horseback to hasten in quest of the canon, who possessed more skill in the medical art.

And like the vivification of the love-hewn Grecian statue was the return of life to the form of the beautiful penitent. A pale pinkiness gradually crept over the snowy paleness, like flame on marble,—deepened to rose on the cheeks,—to coral on the lips; the large humid warm blue eyes, with their long silken lashes, opened, and the return of sensation to the soul was feelingly marked by the flush which deepened all those lovely tints when she perceived the dark warrior countenance bending over her, and met a gaze whose natural severity was softened into almost feminine tenderness. She drew her coarse robe around her neck with the gesture of a nymph of Diana surprised when bathing, and murmuring some incoherent words of gratitude, which yet sounded like babblings of the sweetest music, she raised herself feebly in the arms of the Dominican. Gazing then for an instant at the monstrous beast, which lay wallowing in a pool of its own gore, she shuddered convulsively, and turning to the knight with such a look of admiration and passionate gratitude that it seemed to kindle fire in his breast, she said, “Signor, are you hurt?” in a tone which showed that her anxiety was altogether transferred from herself to him.

“In no wise, noble lady, save in my apprehension lest humanity should lose its masterpiece of beauty!” replied the Hospitaller, who, it seemed, could be galled when it pleased him.

“And my poor vassals!—and the good bishop with

his retinue?" she continued, with a faint smile, turning to the monk.

"They left you, daughter, to your fate, and you may well leave them to theirs!—yet all are safe," replied the monk. "But get you to your litter, for here come a multitude of I know not who—but such as should not see you in this guise, though it be in performance of a holy and necessary penance."

Blushing still more deeply, the lady seated herself in the chair, while the Dominican hurried down among the people, who now began to return from their panic, armed with staves and stones, ordering them to raise the litter, which its bearers had thrown on the ground. But he returned with surprising rapidity, bringing a rich mantle which it seemed belonged to the lady, and which he had scarcely time to throw over her penitential garb, ere a multitude of men-at-arms descended the ravine at a gallop. Among these were Cæsar, Paolo, the Florentine ambassador, and the canon, dragged at a distressing jolt on his mule by Le Beaufort.

It seemed as if this military avalanche infused some new and excessive terror into the lady's mind. She started up with a glance full of fear and suspicion even at her rescuer; but her strength was exhausted, and she must have fallen had not the Hospitaller put his steely arm around her waist, and held her up. Thus supported, and gazing up with a look of supplication to the stalwart warrior, and with the mingled expression of delight and protection with which he returned it, the imagination of the hearers readily assented to Messer Bembo's out-

burst as he approached—"Mars and Venus!" But ere the canon could dismount to tender his services, Cæsar had leaped from his steed, flew up the steps, and exclaimed, with a wild face of alarm, "Lucrezia! my sister! my dearest sister! thou art not hurt?"

As Cæsar pronounced the fatal name, as his bright eyes blazed upon the lady and from her to the Hospitaller, a vortex of emotions whirling in them,—the knight literally tore away his supporting arm, and started a wide pace from her. The lady glanced at him with profound astonishment, grew very pale, and then the blood returned in crimson, not only to her brow, but to her whole frame, for even the white feet became suffused. The expression of intense horror, loathing, and even of fear which, however momentarily, painted itself on that noble and severe countenance, could not be mistaken. After a moment of startled wonder, a crowd of thoughts seemed to rush upon Lucrezia; her own beautiful features flushed at once and sparkled all over with mingled emotions; but the whiteness came again, and she sank down in her chair, as if relapsing into the swoon.

All pressed eagerly around with assistance, excepting the Hospitaller; but Cæsar sternly commanded that none should mount the steps save the canon, who came rubbing a rosemary branch, discarded by some fugitive pilgrim, in his hands, and applied the strong scent to revive the lady. The effect indeed soon followed, for she had not fainted, and stretching her hand to the monk, she murmured in a low voice, "Father, let me be gone! I am not well here."

“Dost thou not know me, Lucrezia? I am thy brother, Cæsar!” said the duke, in a tone of crouching humility very unusual in his voice.

“Cæsar!—my brother!—yes, truly,” she replied, starting up without assistance, and with a degree of wildness. “Welcome, our brother!—My lord, I am well, very well,—in nowise injured,—what do you all here, you and your soldiers?—Know you, sirs, that you break my charter from the holy father, in Rome, by your presence here? Wherefore are our peaceful festivals thus disturbed by armed men?”

“Fear nothing, daughter; all is well!—Remember yourself!—The duke is here by chance; these soldiers are your brother’s, lady!” said the Dominican.

“Pardon me; I am foolish with fear!” replied the lady, melting into a gush of tears, and adding, with an hysteric smile, “Oh, no, no, no, we cannot fear any offence to our new seignury from our brother. Welcome, signor, very welcome home from your victories.”

“In faith, you send so few tidings of your doings about Rome, that I pray you, my fair sister, how was I to know that I was hunting on your lands, being at Nepi?” said Cæsar, with his usual affectation of careless good humour. “But here is one with me who I know will find a warmer ‘God save ye!’—my Lord Paolo Orsino.”

He turned, and with a slight and almost contemptuous gesture, indicated the presence of the young Roman baron, who, pale and quivering with

emotion, ascended some of the steps, and knelt before the lady.

“Signor!—Cæsar, this is not kind,” said Lucrezia, with an angry glance, and coldly extending her hand, which the Orsino passionately kissed. “I am in no condition to receive such a court; and craving all your fair allowance, I will to Nepi, whither I grieve that I cannot invite your armed company, my lord, for the town hath certain privileges granted by the Holy See, on condition that it denies all entry to any soldiers but those belonging to its lords.”

“Yet first, noble lady, pardon the unwitting cause of this disaster, who would a thousand times rather have perilled his own life than so peerless a princess’s!” said Le Beaufort, with enthusiastic warmth, and kneeling on the lowest step of the shrine.

“’Tis granted ere asked,—and indeed we think you perilled your own safety for ours, as well as this valiant gentleman, sir tramontane!” replied the lady, resuming a dignity which seemed natural to her, and with a flashing glance at the Hospitaller. “But like a truly generous giver, it seems as if he has already forgotten what he has bestowed.”

“Thank chance, lady, and not its blind instrument,” said the Hospitaller, with calm austerity. “Even this holy man hazarded himself without arms in your defence!—But if any merit there be, let it go to the advantage of the Lord Orsino, your sworn servant and knight, whose will would have hazarded all for you, whereas it was rather my necessity than choice which put me on the service which you deign to thank.”

“Nay, my lord!—illustrious lady!—methinks the true knight is he that doth the service of one!” said the canon, who had been gazing in an ecstasy of admiration at the too famous beauty. “Wherefore I deem there is none worthier here to be the eagle of your sun of loveliness than this valiant and approved champion of the buffalo, who is also my dear friend, and a most noble gentleman of Ferrara.”

Again Lucrezia glanced at the knight with an expression of half pride, half supplication, but marvellously beautiful in its effulgence of struggling emotions, which pouted the lips with haughtiness, and at the same time moistened the fire in the eyes as if with tears.

“You mark not my habit, messer canon,” replied the Hospitaller, with increased sternness. “I am no less monk than knight,—the soldier of Christ, whose service I may not profane with any earthly admixture,—for if this lady be not celestial, as her beauty would declare her, — what else are we to deem her?”

“Wert thou the Blue Eagle of Este himself turned monk, ’tis too friarly spoken,” said Ser Niccolò, attentively surveying the knight’s countenance, and in allusion to the heraldic bearings of the Dukes of Ferrara.

“Machiavello! best wit of Italy! thou art indeed welcome!” said Lucrezia, with sudden animation, as the Florentine made his way up to kiss the hand which she joyfully extended to greet him. The deep melancholy voice of the Dominican was heard at

this instant, "Daughter! it was no part of thy penance to be the gaze of this courtly presence in these sad weeds," he said. "The litter is prepared, and your guards are in readiness." Many eyes turned towards the monk as he spoke, for although his words were sufficiently common-place, there was a strange ring of warning and even menace in his tones which excited a vague echo in every heart. The composed and majestic countenance, nevertheless, offered some satisfaction to curiosity. It was one which a painter might have taken as a study for St. Paul's, but for its maceration and gloom—St. Paul converted after a life of warlike broils and violent passions.

"But we shall meet again, all, in Rome, where our holy father will thank you, knight, for a life which he values beyond its worth," said Lucrezia, with a beseeching look, and a wavering, wooing smile which it seemed impossible to resist. The Hospitaller only replied with a stiff bend; and the blush which again dyed her fair skin was rendered more glowingly beautiful by the mixture of anger with shame—a rush of rosy light. She hastened down the steps to the litter, which some soldiers now carried, and who presented a still more novel variety in the genus military than all which our travellers had yet encountered. They were Greeks, from the coast of the Morea opposite to Italy, lightly armed in cuirass of mail, with javelins and cross-bows, and riding small, wild-looking horses, rather adapted for flight than to engage in conflict with the massive cavalry of the age.

Cæsar advanced to offer his assistance to his sister in ascending the litter, but seeming as if she did not notice his gesture she gave her hand to Ser Niccolò, who eagerly accepted the honour. It appeared as if she were about to go without any ceremony of farewell, but suddenly remembering herself, she turned and bent to the chief personages of the group with the grace and majesty of the fair goddess whose other attributes were so lavishly bestowed on her.

But amidst all those plumed and helmeted heads bending in homage, her eye sought only the stately figure of the Hospitaller, and rested on it but for a flash of thought. She then entered the litter, which the soldiers at the monk's signal set in motion, and followed by such attendance as had rallied of her scattered retinue, departed. In a few moments the principal evidence of the interrupted festival which remained, were the bleeding buffalo and the garlanded shrine.

"Whew!—this is scant courtesy, brother-in-law!" said Cæsar, slapping Paolo on the back, who stood as if in profound reverie. "By the cross-keys! you should be thankful that our brother-in-arms here is as good a monk as knight, or he were like to prove a dangerous rival."

The Orsino smiled absently, but his eye fell with a somewhat fierce expression on the Knight of St. John. No further words passed, until the cavaliers had remounted; and leaving the buffalo herd to roam unmolested, the whole array once more resumed their passage through the forest.

It was remarkable that Sir Reginald, usually so buoyant and boisterous, continued long silent, and lost in thought. On the contrary, the Hospitaller for the first time began to speak much and hurriedly, as if to silence some importunate inner thought. For the first time he entered into conversation with Cæsar, and seemed to take pleasure in the loud gaiety of the remarks which the duke made on the past adventure, which he compared to the achievements of the ancient paladins, to whom the destruction of the most prodigious monsters was a daily and facile amusement. But when Messer Bembo burst almost into poetry, and somewhat licentious poetry, too, in praise of the excessive beauty of the lady, when Ser Niccolò joined in with his bitter and double-meaning praise, the knight relapsed into his austere silence. From this repose he was at length aroused by an observation of the Orsino, which had little connexion with the canon's rhapsodies. "Did you note the Dominican monk, reverend brother?" he said. "Resembled he in aught the wandering friar who set you on my luckless traces?"

"We saw not his visage; but his hollow voice and stature even now suggested the thought to me," said the Knight of St. John, with a profound sigh.

"Then Cæsar, methinks I may claim some little interest in Donna Lucrezia's regard, since I cannot but think it was her confessor who met and warned me of my danger in crossing the Apennines!" said Paolo, brightening from his habitual gloom.

"And finding you despised the warning, did my sister also set the banditti to teach you less incre-

dulity, brother Paolo?" said Cæsar, with a tart laugh and a frown, which he almost instantly ruffled away into a smiling expression. "Nay, let Saint Guidobald's ghost keep his honours, for it were to suppose the good confessor either a notorious rogue or fool to thus weave and ravel his own designs. Search into the mystery no farther, or you may light on some such fancy as that my sister sent her confessor to warn you—in order that you might keep your distance!"

Sir Reginald laughed at this suggestion, but without his usual light-hearted peal.

The forests around Nepi gradually thinned, and the cavalcade once more appeared on the open campagna, on which the sun poured the full fervour of his beams until the earth itself seemed to beat up light. But there was no refuge from the heat in that vast plain, which spread on every side with the broad sterility of an African desert. Half blinded and involved in clouds of dust, which glittered like powdered gold high above their heads, they proceeded, Cæsar now lingering in the rear. But suddenly Don Migueloto rode up to the army and ordered a general halt. He gave no explanation of his reasons, and the cause was only declared when the approaching gleam of banners and lances on their rear announced the approach of some unexpected body of armed men.

CHAPTER XIV.

ROME !

“She who was named Eternal, and arrayed
Her warriors but to conquer—she who veiled
Earth with her haughty shadow, and displayed,
Until the o’ercanopied horizon failed,
Her rushing wings—Oh ! she who was Almighty hailed !”

THE place of the halt was on the summit of a hill, whence the distant walls of Rome, set with numerous towers, were visible, rising abruptly in the plain. A black volcanic waste spread around, diversified only by stagnant ponds, which exhaled a sulphureous stench, or by a solitary pine, standing like a mourner in the desolation.

Wheeling their horses round, our travellers scanned with anxiety the approaching troop ; but as the halt of Cæsar’s array compelled his masses to spread out, their followers halted too, as if for the first time perceiving that they were coming on so powerful a body. After a few moments standing at gaze, Cæsar commanded Migueloto to tie a white banderol to his lance, and advance to demand, in his name, who the new comers were, and their business in the

Comarca of Rome. But ere the order was given, a figure arrayed in the many-coloured garb of a herald, with a silver wand in his hand, emerged from the opposite ranks, and ascended the intervening hill with the calm assurance befitting his office. Cæsar dashed forward impatiently to meet him, and the herald immediately knelt, uncovered his head, and pronounced in a loud tone—"Potent lord! or whoever you may be,—my master and sender, Vitellozzo Vitelli, Lord of Città di Castello, a devout pilgrim to the holy jubilee, availing himself of the safe conduct offered to all men alike by our holy father,—would know to whom he sends his peaceful greeting by me, that no blame may attach to him if it should turn out that ye are otherwise inclined."

To very few of the hearers was this message pleasing, for Vitellozzo was chief of the powerful family of the Vitelli, whose immense possessions *out* of Rome rendered them the most formidable *in* it, of all the rebellious feudatories of the Holy See. In the league formed against the pretensions of Alexander VI., the Vitelli had been the strongest link, for in addition to the common motive of the barons, in resisting the efforts to crush their power, the Vitelli were united to the Orsini by the ties of blood, and consequently to the banished Medici of Florence. To the cause of the latter they were farther bound by the revenge which their chieftain cherished against the Florentines for the death of his brother, who, commanding his mercenaries in their service, was beheaded by them for some real or supposed treason. Vitellozzo's German horsemen had principally caused

the defeat of the papal forces in the pitched field of Bracciano, and since then his pride and arrogance had swelled to such a degree that he was said to project the expelling of Alexander himself from the chair of St. Peter.

Such was the devotee, who, surrounded by nearly a thousand horsemen, whose ponderous figures and complete panoply attested their genealogy from the ancient ravagers of Italy, appeared on his way to join in the celebration of the great feast of Christianity.

Whatever might have been the feelings with which Cæsar listened to the herald's announcement, after scarcely a moment's thought, he replied in a tone of delight, "Signor Paolo, hear you?—our good fortune is at its height now, and our peace will indeed be written in adamant, if the noble Vitelli sign it—at least seal it—for it remembers me the Lord of Città di Castello boasts he cannot write. But why comes he with all this array of arms to a Christian rite of peace?"

"Leave me to inquire that, my lord, and to settle the terms of fellowship and brotherhood between ye!" said the Orsino with great eagerness.

"Fellowship and brotherhood!—the Vitelli are vassals of the church—I am its lieutenant!" said Cæsar, with a momentary flash of his natural haughtiness; but as his experienced eye again perused the massive squadrons below, the smile returned to his lips. "Go then, dear brother, that shall be; but let not your conference be long, or the sun will melt away my men in their armour."

“Lead on, herald,” said the Orsino, and with a significant glance of triumph at Sir Reginald, he followed the parti-coloured messenger towards the troops of his friend.

“I know not well what to think of this!” said Cæsar to Migueloto, who stood beside him, and in that tone scarcely above a whisper, which habit only enabled the captain to hear distinctly. “We have the vantage of numbers, but I doubt if we could bide the shock of yonder sandy-locked barbarians? Moreover, it were not perchance without its use, that his holiness should comprehend that, however maligned, we are yet of some service to his state. And the Florentines may learn, too, that our friendship is at least the frost which keeps this torrent from rushing down upon them?”

As he spoke Ser Niccolò approached. “My lord duke,” he said, with a sarcastic and yet indignant expression, “Well may you call your power a child’s bauble if you suffer this army of your enemies to join the insurgent Orsini and the other barons in Rome!”

“Hush, my dear master!—What can I do?—The time may come—*shall* come!” replied Cæsar. “’Tis not by force that men slay the rushing bull! And see you not yonder cuirassiers are savages from the Elbe and Danube?—If these troops of mine were overthrown, then indeed might Vitellozzo march on Rome, and dethrone our holy father (Heaven forbid!) in the presence of the whole Christian world!”

“The pilgrims would by no means suffer it!—

They come from remote lands, and know no reason which could justify treason against Heaven in the person of its earthly lieutenant!" replied Machiavelli, with a smile, and then a sigh, which seemed to acknowledge the wisdom of the duke's fears.

"Trust me, master, I will only yield as a wave that flows away until it is high enough to overwhelm," returned the Borgia.

"Sinewy slaves, indeed!" continued Ser Niccolò, surveying the German riders. "But why levy you not a band in England, where the men are yet bigger, and so staunch and fiery, that they beat the French against as fearful odds as the French beat us?"

"I have thought of that—but they are a people so fierce and unruly that their own kings cannot govern them," replied Cæsar. "But, lo, our peacemaker—our lovesick peacemaker—seems to succeed, for here comes the giant himself in his company."

"I marvel he breaks not the back even of that antediluvian steed!" said Ser Niccolò, with the scorn of mind for matter, when the vast form of Vitellozzo emerged from his ranks, on a white steed of suitable bulk. Telamonian Ajax himself would scarcely have contended with such a figure even for the arms of Achilles, so vast and portentous showed the chieftain, who was nearly seven feet high, of proportionable bulk, mounted on a prodigious steed, which, like himself, was encased in massive armour, and with a lofty black plume waving over his helmet, which indeed seemed more like an iron barrel than the receptacle of a human head. To this immense

stature, so unusual among the Italians, Vitellozzo owed great part of his fame and the singular fidelity which his barbarians preserved rather to his bulk than to himself, although indeed there were few chieftains whose riches and ferocity entitled them more to the esteem of the mercenary soldier.

Vitellozzo advanced with the Orsino, followed only by two spearmen, about a bow-shot beyond his cuirassiers; but suddenly he paused, and his loud voice could be heard even to the distance at which the Borgia stood, exclaiming, "No, by St. Paul, I'll venture no nearer to his nets till I have better assurance how far they are spread!"

Paolo seemed then to speak in a deprecating tone; but Cæsar, with his usual promptitude, desired Migueloto to keep his array at a stand, set spurs to his horse, and descended alone to meet his suspicious visitor.

This act of apparent confidence did more to win Vitellozzo than all the rhetoric of the Orsino. His large visage, which had settled into an obstinate and bull-like lower, became electrified as if with surprise, and brightened up, while his thoughts passed like gloomy clouds over it, in a manner which showed that he possessed but little of the art of concealing them.

"Your grace is nobly welcome!—Body of me! alone?" exclaimed he, staring for a moment as if incredulously, and then looking round at his lancers with a strange expression of alarm.

"I never trust—half—Vitellozzo!" replied the duke. "But methinks you have shown but little

confidence in our holy father's pledge, since you travel to the jubilee with a thousand spears !”

“ Our holy father has only promised to protect those who cannot protect themselves,” replied the lord of Castello, recovering his natural fierceness and insolence of manner. “ Moreover, we had heard only that our dear friend, Paolo, had been seized on his way by brigands—not that he was rescued ! And to conclude, we would give our rogues a share in the indulgences of this blessed time—for, God's faith ! they need it.”

“ But now that I have declared the terms of our agreement, and the valiant Vitello assents to them, his force but adds to yours, Cæsar !” interposed the Orsino.

“ So be it !” replied the duke, with a courteous bend, and affecting not to notice the expression of irresolute doubt on the baron's face, which exhibited its meanings on too large a scale to be easily mistaken.

Muttering something incoherently, Vitellozzo at length concluded with,—“ But we hear you have the ambassador of the Florentine rabble with you ; and *I* have with me their banished prince—Pier de Medici !”

This information did indeed somewhat startle Cæsar. “ But—well !” he said, after a moment's pause. “ Pier wends to Rome also as a pilgrim, like yourself !—As such, the lieutenant of the father of Christendom can, without offence to any man or state, bid him welcome.”

A slender but graceful knight, armed in complete

steel, excepting that he wore no helmet, and his long fair hair was parted over a countenance full of mildness and melancholy, now rode towards the speakers. A single man-at-arms, with a blue banner, strewed with the well known golden balls of the Medici, followed him. By a coincidence not very desirable, Machiavelli at the same moment joined the duke, so that the expelled prince and the ambassador of the republic met face to face. There was a moment's pause.

"Ser Niccolò, of the Machiavelli?" said Pier, in a mild tone. "A learned and valiant gentleman, whom indeed we are very glad to see."

"I am the ambassador of the Florentine republic, signor," replied Machiavelli, somewhat sternly. "But I am indeed very glad also to meet your lordship here."

"Ha, ha, Messer Niccolò, how like your citizens my late visit to the Valdarno?" said Vitellozzo, smiling ferociously at the recollections which arose in his mind.

"So well that they intend to return it anon, my lord," replied the envoy.

"I trow that all the plagues of Egypt could not have done better among the lands of those bloody murderers!" continued the gigantic chieftain, flushing darkly.

"Nay, nay, you take too many for one!—Your brother's manes must long since have been appeased!" said Cæsar, purposely reviving the recollection.

"There are some, Lord Cæsar, who value a brother's blood as merchants do their wares!" re-

turned Vitellozzo fiercely. "But mine I have written on every rood of Florentine earth, and hope to do it yet more plainly in Florence herself!"

"Tush, tush, Vitello,—you mistake," interposed Pier earnestly, to his impolitic ally.

"I shall not fail to write to my lords to tell them so," replied Ser Niccolò.

"And add—" continued the chieftain in a raised voice and trembling with rage, when again Pier interrupted him.

"Nay, but rather, my good Niccolò," he said, "ride on with me, and I will speak to thee of matters conducive to the ending of this dire brawl!"

"My lord, as we see, you have your pills gilded," replied the ambassador, with a scornful glance at the banner; "but yet, I do assure you, the Florentine republic will not swallow them again."

"Sirs, sirs," said Bembo, who had at length joined in the group, "when are we to reach Rome, if we stand here chatting until the sun goes down?—'Tis my advice that we all proceed instantly, and leave future matters to futurity."

Perceiving that no good was likely to ensue from any further discussion, all parties tacitly assented to this arrangement; and Cæsar, as if to give the friends an opportunity of conversing freely, said that he would be their herald into Rome; and bending courteously to the group, he motioned to Machiavelli, returned with him to his own troops, and gave the order to advance. Some short time elapsed ere Vitellozzo's party followed the example.

"And dost thou think that I will ever willingly

endure the arrogant equality of yonder Gog and Magog in one?—that bull in armour?” said Cæsar, observing the gloom which lingered on Machiavelli’s brow. “And for the Medici!—dost thou deem that I have forgotten the day when I journeyed to Florence to beg the life of a servant of mine, who had slain a Florentine citizen in some brawl, of this very Pier? My father was then but a simple cardinal, looking for the tiara in the dust—and Pier was in the puff of his fortune! By the mass, Niccolò, I waited a whole day in his ante-chamber among his lacqueys, and at sunset he sent me word he was busy, and could not see me! Busy! at a feast! Whereat, being stung, I left the poor wretch to his mercy, and he had him broken on the wheel; my most faithful servant—broken on the wheel!”

Ser Niccolò looked somewhat comforted at this vivid recollection of an insult, which he knew the proud never forgive.

The distant city gradually became more visible, with its innumerable spires and pinnacles rising in the brilliant air; and the desert aspect of the country was relieved by numerous groups of pilgrims. The majority of the devotees were indeed arrived, especially those who came from remote districts of Europe, but many groups of knights with their vassals, and the farmers and serfs of the campagna, poured forth. Sometimes, too, an abbot with all his monastery, or an abbess with her gentle recluses, ambled over the plain on their sleek mules, attended by armed retainers, and frequently bearing some precious relics under sumptuous canopies. Some

were travelling as if to a carousal, others to a funeral; some armed, some almost naked, beggars, princes, priests, nobles, vassals, soldiers, trooped on for once in peace and mutual forbearance. Devotion took many curious forms; but in particular a group of Spanish pilgrims went past, with the cockle-shells of St. James of Compostella in their broad hats, bare to the waist, their backs completely raw and streaming with blood from the severe flagellation they inflicted on themselves with leather whips, singing loud Hosannas as they went.

But Rome was before the gaze of Cæsar and his companion—only the narrow Tiber seemed to flow between—for a mist of glory shed over it by the setting sun confused the perception of distance.

“Rome, Rome, my Niccolò!” exclaimed Cæsar, with an enthusiasm to which he seldom gave way. “There she stands, the dethroned empress of the world, who will place her diadem on the brow of the peerless knight that shall win it back from the caitiff hands which have torn it from her temples! By the mass! yon circling walls with their towers seem to me to float in the air like one vast crown of beaten gold!”

“Is not yonder the tomb of Nero?” said Ser Niccolò, with extreme coldness, pointing to a remote and solitary ruin.

“Ay, and a fortress of the Frangipani!” said Cæsar, calming down. “Mark you not their banner with the broken loaf? But what is all that stirring on the bridge?”

“I see what appears to me like a great procession,

and a mob," replied Ser Niccolò, straining his sight. "But here come wayfarers, who I doubt not bring us the news."

Two personages mounted on mules, one of whom wore the mitre and robes of a bishop, followed at a distance by some knights whose rich armour continually flashed like cloth of diamonds in the sun, were seen approaching.

"By my faith, it is my friend the Bishop of Modena, Datary, and king of financiers," said Cæsar, eagerly. "And with him comes the pompous fool, Master John of Strasburgh, his holiness's master of the ceremonies, who if the gates of heaven were open to all mankind but for half an hour, would wait till it came to the turn of the deans before he offered to enter."

The personages whose characters were thus described were now so near that their material presentments might also be scrutinized. The Datary was a man about sixty, with a little, lean and shrivelled form, and a face which was generally cast down as if in humility, but when lifted, so closely resembled that of a red fox, in the sharp cunning features, in the peculiar glitter of the eye, that few beheld it without making the comparison. The other was a fat bulky man, whose large, dull, German visage was as it were oiled all over with self-complacency and stolidity, and contrasted curiously with the acute physiognomy of the Datary. This was that papal Polonius, John Burchard, whose diary remains to verify some of the most incredible passages of this true history.

“Burciardo! yonder is the duke,” exclaimed the Datary, switching his mule.

“It cannot be—without befitting attendance!” said the master of the ceremonies, “and in advance of his whole army.”

“Nay, but it is!—there is not another pair of eyes in all Italy which flash like those,” continued the Datary, pushing vigorously on.

“It does not become your reverend lordship to trot,” returned Burchard.

“It becomes every man—prudent man at least—to show his zeal on this happy occasion,” said the bishop, continuing at a pace which soon brought him to the spot where the duke and the Florentine had paused. Great ceremonies of welcome ensued, and the Datary informed Cæsar that his holiness had ordered his entry should be greeted with every mark of respect, and that a procession awaited him at the Ponte Molle.

“His holiness has also decreed your grace a gold and silver illumination, and a triumphal pomp, which, inasmuch as sufficient time has not been allowed for preparation, we pray your grace to excuse,” said the Dean of Strasburgh with becoming pomposity. “Meanwhile I am to conduct the most serene personage to the Colonna palace, which his holiness has been pleased to confer upon him, not only as a present lodging, but as a lodging present, and where he is to reside henceforth.”

“The Colonna palace! is there then no room for a simple soldier in the Vatican?” said Cæsar, with a dark frown.

"The royal lady, your august spouse, inhabits the Colonna palace, and there only can your grace's retinue be suitably lodged," replied Burchard, timorously shrinking from the ominous scowl. "The sacred palace is filled with illustrious pilgrims, and the magnificent lady, Donna Lucrezia, is expected to arrive there to-morrow."

"Donna Lucrezia! lodged in the Vatican?" exclaimed Cæsar. "Surely so great a scandal—why 'tis as if we heard—tell me, Burciardo, hast thou in all thy experience, in all thy researches in the chronicles of the papacy, heard of women openly lodged in the palace of St. Peter?"

"Heard we never of Pope Joan?" whispered Ser Niccolò; but Burchard merely looked foolish and frightened, and made no reply.

"But since the holy father cannot err, we are bound to obey his will, without inquiring into it," said the duke with ironical bitterness. "Hasten, honest John, and tell the gapers I am coming. And thou, Don Miguel," he added, as the obsequious master of the ceremonies retired, "go and tell the Orsino and his companions to come up and share my honours as brethren should—and fail not to enlarge upon this novelty of lodging a lady in the house of a priest. And so his holiness will have the Tiber between himself and his loving son?" he continued, to the Datary, as his ready captain started off.

"Yea, and your grace cannot cross it without permission asked," returned the Datary, with a short, dry, malicious laugh. "Old Piccolomini, to whom

the council gave the government of the city when the Orsini flew to arms, on learning Signor Paolo's mishap,—the Cardinal of Sienna, I ought to say!—has appointed a new captain to Santangelo."

"Wherefore then did his holiness make me constable for life?" said Cæsar, clenching his teeth.

"You had need to visit us, my lord, at this time," continued the Datary. "There are men about his holiness bent on making mischief between ye, and who throw a cross light on all you do!—Why, when the Orsino disappeared, it was as much as those who were faithful to you could do to hinder him from putting himself at the head of his guards to march and punish the banditti, leaving Rome to be seized by the barons. 'Tis strange how strongly he is set on this match now that the negotiation with Ferrara has failed."

"My sister is a widow now—full twelve months! his holiness hath his reasons!" returned Cæsar. "But I will find a way with all these evil counselors! Have ye yet heard in Rome of the merry trick I played Signor Don Remiro in Ronciglione?"

The Datary bent the full keenness of his foxy eyes on Cæsar, with a smile that seemed to anticipate something particularly facetious, and replied in the negative. But when the duke related the tragedy, with a gaiety which was really fiendish, the financier's visage whitened, as if he himself were about to receive a doom of similar horror.

"You do not laugh, monsignor, and yet what is more diverting than to see a rogue caught in his own

springes?" said Cæsar, sharply turning to the pallid minister.

"I conceive so, my lord,—yes, it is very diverting, but I know not what his holiness will think—sawn in twain!" stammered the Datary.

"A double politician easily makes two," said the duke, laughing scornfully. "But I will produce evidence of his guilt to satisfy a consistory of unbelieving Jews! But how say you—the Orsini drew their knives?"

"All Rome was in a roar; the Colonna themselves ventured to appear; the Cenci, the Conti, the Salviati barricaded their streets; we were all out of our senses with alarm saving his holiness, who, when the pilgrims flocked down to the Vatican in commotion, spoke to them from the balcony, and convinced them that it was not one of their number who had been captured."

"Why, the old ruins must be nigh peopled again with this foreign multitude!" said Cæsar, observing with surprise the immense masses which covered the way from the river to the city walls.

"But, alas! they are uncommonly greedy, and yield little of what might be expected in return for the prodigal beneficence of the holy father!" said the rapacious financier sadly.

"Ye should have made your indulgences dearer then, and harder to win—why take ye not the lesson from women?" returned Cæsar. The Datary had by this time recovered from his panic, and began laughing, apparently at some sprightly recollection.

“Your grace will be surprised to see the cardinal of Lisbon, without attendance, and almost in rags, that was once the most magnificent of the sacred college?” he said, still laughing. “You shall hear how it chanced. Being as he imagined at death’s door, and thinking to cheat the church of her inheritance of his wealth, he made it all away in gifts to his relations and servants before he drew the breath. But Heaven, to punish him for his designed fraud, answered their hypocritical prayers, and he recovered; but not one of those ungrateful wretches would bestow on him even an alms from his own riches, and now he is a beggar, and a living warning to all who think to cheat the sacred treasury!”

It was a gorgeous spectacle which now saluted the gaze of the returning general of the church. The river was crowded with gilded galleys, whose richly carved prows, variegated standards, and pictured keels were magnificently relieved by the burnished gold of the waves. The bridge was spanned by a triumphal arch, in which the ingenious artist, while preserving the proportions of architecture, had managed to twist laurels, and spears, and trumpets into a resemblance of its richest ornaments; on the bridge were assembled the principal persons deputed to receive the duke—cardinals, in their scarlet robes and purple mantles, on mules; the barons of Rome, principally of inferior grade, glittering in armour and in jewelled mantles of flaunting colours; prelates in sacerdotal pomp; numerous domestics, pages, and footmen or staffieri in the most gorgeous liveries, and

surrounded by the steel-clad ranks of the pope's Spanish guard.

Beyond the bridge the whole valley between the Marian and Pincian hills, up which the road to Rome proceeds, was thronged with a splendid and ever-varying multitude. Nobles, surrounded each by his mass of armed retainers; ambassadors from foreign courts displaying the royal banner of their countries, each attended by his glittering herald and retinues, which vied with one another in prodigality of decoration, velveted, jewelled, embroidered, and plumed; the guilds of the city, each headed by its gonfalonier, with rich flags ornamented with some appropriate device; the prefect of Rome with a white flag, on which, in letters of gold surrounded by laurel, blazed the antique initials S. P. Q. R.; and mingling with all these gorgeous groups—flooding indeed the whole valley, crowning the pine-clad mounts which formed it, massed upon the walls, and all the ascents of the seven hills, from whence even the most distant view could be obtained,—were grouped innumerable gazers—pilgrims from every land of the known world, in every garb, speaking as many tongues as at the confusion of Babel. The round battlements of St. Angelo topped the view, or rather the vast standard, wrought with golden keys of enormous size, which waved from a lofty tree on its summit. Trumpets and drums resounded in all directions, and over the whole animated and dazzlingly changeful spectacle, shone the sky of a Roman twilight, like a dome of pallid gold.

The duke had scarcely time to take a cursory view of these preparations ere Paolo Orsino, with Sir Reginald and Don Migueloto, rode up to him.

"Vitellozzo prays your excuse, my lord," said the Orsino, with obvious hesitation. "He dares not trust his barbarians to any guidance but his own."

"Alas, Paolo, he still mistrusts us!" replied Cæsar, mournfully. "Is there no way by which we can convince him of our sincerity? Go, dear Paolo, and say that we entreat him, then, to precede us into the city, and to take up his quarters round the Colonna palace, for we will have no guard but his valiant barbarians!"

"Is the Colonna palace, then, confiscated?" said the baron, rather aghast at this intimation of the total ruin, even of the nobles against whom his house had so long waged war.

"Ay, dost thou think, brother, that 'tis fit when the hornets are dispersed to leave the nest?" returned Cæsar. "Where, too, is the noble Hospitaller? He should share these vanities with us!"

"He has dropped far in the rear, to gloom at his leisure," said Paolo testily; and after a moment's thought he hastened back to the Vitelli.

"Noble English knight, may I crave you to warn our friends at the bridge of our approach?" said Cæsar, with such bland courtesy, that Sir Reginald could not refuse, and the knight, although indignant at the office of herald thus thrust upon him, bowed and dashed his war-horse forward to the bridge.

"Oh, my Niccolò, fear thou not but I will some day avenge thy lords on this insolent brood!" said

Cæsar, with the rage hitherto suppressed flashing in his eyes.

“Will your grace have your tent pitched, and attire you in more state for this great occasion?” said Don Migueloto.

“I know not which of my garbs might be noted among all this crimson and gold!” said the duke. “Herein, to be observed, a man must be simple! I will wear the plainest robe I have—the black velvet—the velvet I wore at Gandia’s funeral!—a fraternal sadness which will give the lie to many a gossip; and let my gentlemen be all in their doleful blacks too!”

A tent was hastily pitched at some remove from the road, along which the legions of Vitellozzo now heavily moved. Whether the chieftain, notwithstanding those suspicions of the Borgia which never left him, found that he could not with any grace refuse his request, or that the making it lulled his fears, he complied; and heading his cuirassiers with a broad axe in his hand, the edge of which he turned over his mighty shoulder from those he approached, he passed over Ponte Molle but a few minutes before Cæsar followed.

In his lugubrious dress of black velvet, ornamented only by a chain of massive gold beads, and a medal in his hat, the duke’s appearance was certainly more remarked than the gayest which he could have assumed. A general shout, followed by a protracted buzz of curiosity, once more shook the shores of the Tiber, which had so often echoed to the welcome of conquerors. Pier de Medici had accompanied Vitel-

lozzo into the city, with his visor closed, and near the duke rode only the Orsino and Machiavelli. Don Migueloto had been despatched with some secret commission to the array in the rear.

Observing the duke's approach, the master of the ceremonies, who was watching with intense anxiety for the precise instant, made a bow to the personages whose immediate office it was to receive him. Three cardinals instantly set their mules in motion. The first was an ancient man, whose serene and pious visage, worn by time and maceration, presented an engaging and dignified portrait of devotion; the two others were young men, both handsome and of noble persons, one of them remarkable for his stately and princely gravity, and his fellow for a dashing vivacity rather befitting the cavalier than the priest. The former was the Cardinal of Medici, afterwards Leo X. The latter, the Cardinal Adrian of Corneto, famous for his share in a subsequent tragical adventure. The eldest cardinal was afterwards that Pius III. whose short reign left only regrets behind.

The shout again arose—and again sunk into silence—when the cardinal and the duke met, and the venerable prelate delivered the benediction of the church, and afterwards a Latin harangue in commendation of his exploits. The Borgia listened with bare head, and bending in deep humility over his steed, whose snorts frequently disturbed the harangue, and at which the master of the ceremonies glanced with restrained indignation. Once or twice the Cardinal of Medici involuntarily smiled, perhaps at the monkish Latin of his superior, perhaps at the gro-

tesque faces and sly buffooneries of the young Corneto during the speeches of welcome and modest acceptance. And before it was concluded,—despite all the warning waftures of the Dean of Strasburgh's wand of office,—an old nobleman on foot, and surrounded by a number of cavaliers, a cardinal, another prelate, and about a score of footmen in the white and red flames of the Orsini livery, approached. The last words of the greeting were interrupted by the embraces of Paolo Orsino and his family, of whom the ancient nobleman was his father, the Duke of Gravina.

Some idea of the power of this great house may be formed from the fact, that among the Orsini who pressed to receive the heir of their chieftain were no less than seven barons, a cardinal, an archbishop, and nearly a score of inferior captains, who each, however, possessed some castle or place of strength near Rome. In spite of all efforts to the contrary, tears rushed down the furrowed cheeks of Gravina, when he clasped his son to his breast, and sobs heaved his stout old heart. Cæsar himself seemed moved, for he turned aside as if to conceal his feelings; but those to whom he turned thought that his lips writhed rather with derision than tenderness.

The Orsini were relieved from an observation, which after the first burst of joy became oppressive, by the cares of Burchard, who now requested the ambassadors to advance and pay their compliments. Instantly the whole diplomatic corps was in motion, struggling and hurrying to gain the precedence, which the dean vainly attempted to obviate by yelling to

each his proper station in the advance. The English ambassador, a grave and majestic noble, distinguished by the pointed beard then coming into fashion in the west, with his retinue of young cavaliers, pushed so vigorously forward that he arrived as soon as the emperor's envoy, who had yet, by prescription, precedence of all, and was, moreover, favoured in locality by master John of Strasburgh.

Great confusion followed this untoward event, the rest of the ambassadors arriving to greet the duke in such disorder and eagerness that he laughed and exclaimed—"What, messires, ye will knock off each other's spurs at this rate!"

"None shall but touch mine till he hath first knocked my head off, signor!" exclaimed the Spanish ambassador, furiously.

"The Spaniards are not wont to boast, my lord knows!" said the French ambassador—a splendid cavalier, who sat his steed with knightly grace, and eyed the stiff Spaniard with evident disdain.

"Ah, noble d'Aubigny!" said Cæsar, eagerly stretching his hand to the envoy of the formidable power he had offended. "Never did I rejoice more to behold thy victorious crest, for I see thou art at our peaceful triumph in complete panoply."

"Which I may not change till I have fulfilled my king's behests from Milan," replied the French warrior, haughtily, and Cæsar turned from him to caress the Spaniard.

While the ambassadors were offering their congratulations, Paolo was searching among the crowds for his deliverers, that he might present them to his

sire. But Sir Reginald, offended at the use to which Cæsar had put him, had hastened over the bridge, and the Hospitaller had not appeared for some time. Burciardo allowed as long as possible for the compliments, but he now pushed into the throng to inform the duke that the most serene and royal princess his wife had been for a long period awaiting his presence on the other side of the bridge.

Cæsar slightly started, and waving his hand with smiling courtesy to the ambassadors, set his horse in motion. The master of the ceremonies earnestly entreated them not to stir, but disregarding his entreaties all pushed fiercely on, and he was swept along in the height of his expostulations. As Cæsar crossed the bridge his person became distinctly visible to the immense groups which filled the valley to Rome, and the sinister gloom of his habiliments uniting with the tremendous reports of his character, produced a great effect. Some faint attempts at a shout were audible, which died away in indistinct and awe-struck mutters,—were again renewed, and then passed into utter silence.

The silence of a great multitude is fearful, and Cæsar glanced with his brilliant eyes over the masses with some alarm. Luckily some partisans of the exiled Colonna, screened by distance, ventured to raise their war-cry, and instantly arose a stormy “Viva Borgia!” — “Orso, Orso!” — which effectually broke the silence.

The bride of Cæsar appeared a little way beyond the bridge, mounted on a palfrey covered with white velvet, led by grooms in cloth of gold, under a

canopy of crimson velvet sown with the lilies of France, and surmounted by a royal crown, borne by four knights in silver armour. She was a very young and lively-looking French girl, with an air of coquetry and vivacity which disappeared instantly, as well as the colour from her cheek, as her terrible lord appeared. A bevy of beautiful ladies, her attendants, and the proud consorts of the barons of Rome, formed a superb cavalcade around her.

“See you, neighbour, how he kisses her hand, while his eyes are all the while among the damsels about her?” said a knight in the crowd to a little deformed dwarf, who with a smile of malignant mirth stood scratching a disproportioned head beside him.

“And why not, neighbour? They are older acquaintances of his than the north girl,” replied the dwarf. “Know you not that to avoid scandal Cæsar has appointed his seraglio to wait on his wife?”

At this moment a considerable confusion and uproar in the crowd forming the procession attracted the attention of all. In truth the ambassadors, after struggling and jostling one another over the bridge, had come to direct contest at its exit, each obstinately refusing to yield to the other. The imperial ambassador’s precedence alone was not disputed, but the ambassadors of France, Spain, England, Naples, and Navarre, fiercely contended for the lead. In vain did Burchard quote innumerable authorities assigning them each their place in the apostolic processions;—his voice, though loud

and shrill, was lost in the uproar. Swords were drawn, and the French and English ambassadors were at sharp and angry parley.

“The most Christian king is the eldest son of the church!” yelled the master of the ceremonies; “and as such ——”

“We are ambassadors from the Lord Cæsar’s royal father-in-law, and as such ——,” remonstrated the Navarrese.

“The crown of England shall yield to none but that of the empire!” shouted the English ambassador.

“The most Catholic kings, my sovereigns!”—began the Spanish envoy, stroking his long beard rapidly.

“We are the first, as the representatives of the church’s faithful vassal, king Don Federigo of Naples!” shouted the Neapolitans.

The multitudes of the different nations scattered among the crowds caught intelligence of what was going on, and their tumultuous cries and gestures seemed to announce some terrible outbreak.

Cæsar took the opportunity to commence his policy of conciliation to the French.

“Marshal d’Aubigny,” he said, in the first pause of the uproar. “I will ride between you and the ambassador of the emperor. I may surely this day choose my company! Navarre cannot be denied his place by his sovereign’s daughter!”

“Now by the thistle of my own Scotland, I will not yield to all England and Italy to boot!” said the ambassador, who was a valorous soldier of fortune,

by birth a Scot, and allied to the royal family of Scotland, as he dashed forward to the place assigned him.

“St. George and England to the rescue!” shouted a young knight, urging his steed with headlong violence through the crowd, drawing his sword, and bending low to the ambassador.

“Sir Reginald Le Beaufort!” exclaimed the ambassador. “Good knight and loyal!—nay, the odds are too much against us; but, Master Dean, take notice that I withdraw myself from the procession, because I am not allowed my proper place in it.”

“Your proper place, magnificent signor,” began the worthy dean.

“God’s life! is it at the tail of the men who cannot face us in the field!” returned the foaming English earl. “Here is my gauntlet against the best of you that denies the right of the crown of England to march before all but the Imperial.”

“My lord, as far back as any record extends, the kings of France”—ejaculated the master of the ceremonies.

“French knights! which of you will break a lance with me on this quarrel!” shouted Sir Reginald.

Many a hand was instantly on the lance, many a steed received a sudden spur; but the aged cardinal of Sienna urged his mule between the enraged challenger and his antagonists.

“Know ye not, bold man!” he exclaimed, “that in this holy season of Christian love and fellowship of all men in Christ, decree of excommunication—

excommunication which is damnation !—is denounced against all who shall draw brand or dagger, or wield lance in any manner of hostility ?”

There was immediately a pause of submission, reluctant indeed, but still of submission. Lances sunk, steeds were checked, and during the pause Burciardo restored his glove to the English ambassador, who received it with a mixture of rage and submission.

Somewhat cooling his ire, the ambassador turned to invite his valiant young countryman to accompany him home to his palace, when Paolo Orsino, who had heard the voice at a distance, arrived with all his potent kinsmen around him. He pressed Sir Reginald so vehemently to become his guest, moreover declaring that he had found the canon, and had despatched him to obtain the Hospitaller’s company too, that Le Beaufort declined the ambassador’s proffer, and accepted that of his friend.

The procession was now moving on, and although the hues of twilight began to fall purple on the groups, the splendour of the effect, as it went, could scarcely be surpassed. Helmets and mitres flashed, plumes soared, banners streamed, lances sparkled—a rainbow effulgence of colour glowed along the rich groups in their liveries and pompous ceremonial garbs. All the discordant peals of military music, softened amid the general tramp and murmur, harmonized with one gorgeous triumphal melody. A poet might have imagined he was gazing on an antique Roman spectacle, when conquerors returned with the spoils of nations ! The splendour of the

show produced its usual effect on that vast mob, despite the secret aversion and horror entertained by so many against its hero; and as the procession reached the Porta del Popolo, the shouts of welcome and gratulation shook the seven hills of the eternal city, as they had shaken them to greet the return of a Pompey or the departure of a Brutus!

The moment the procession reached the walls, the bells of the innumerable churches of Rome burst into a simultaneous peal, and kept up their stirring melody during its whole progress through the city, till the air itself seemed maddening with clamour. At the same time, immense bonfires were kindled on the seven hills, and vast pyramids of flame ascended above the cypresses, and palaces, and ruins which thickly strewed them. The twilight reddening with the reflection of the fires, gave a new and singularly beautiful hue to the colours of the procession, as it passed up the Corso, the palaces on each side of which were hung with costly pictures, and tapestry, banners, and triumphal arches, inscribed with glorifying inscriptions and verses.

Turning from the Corso to go to Santangelo, the procession passed towards the Piazza Navona. In this district lay the chief strength of the Orsini—the great square being environed with the palaces of the chief barons of the name, and streets inhabited only by their clansmen or clients, as the Roman nobles were still pleased to style their dependents. Here were their fortress of Monte Giordano, and the palace of the Massimi, their devoted kinsmen and allies, the colony extending its ramifications over a great space

to the bend of the river, opposite the Isle of the Tiber, where arose, on the ruins of the theatre of Marcellus, their strong fortress, which they pacifically denominated Palazzo Orsini. Entering this camp, as it might be called, of his enemies, the narrow gloomy streets of which were all hung with chains, levelled cannon appearing at every opening into the square,—Cæsar looked round for the Orsini.

“ I will not enter without my hosts ! ” he said, with a caressing smile, and backing his horse till it was abreast with Paolo’s, he added, “ We will on together like brothers—for, indeed, henceforth we are to be but equals in Rome ! ”

Probably the Orsini divined the duke’s suspicions, for there was something disdainful in the silent bend with which he received this honour. The procession moved on.

They entered the great square. All looked dark, silent, and melancholy. Suddenly, a blast of trumpets was heard, and as if by magic an immense bonfire blazed up in the centre of the square, to the height of the surrounding houses ; garlands of flaming pitch appeared at every window ; and starting from the pavements on which they were couched, as from the earth, gleamed an armed multitude, all in the Orsini livery ! Cæsar gave an involuntary jerk in his saddle, put his hand on his dagger, and seized Paolo’s hand—who returned his grasp with a friendly pressure, and another smile of doubtful meaning. But the duke perceived instantly that no treachery was meant, and he himself joined in the uproarious shouts which now resounded from every street and

alley, and palace around, of Orso !—Borgia ! Borgia !
—Borgia ! Orso !

With this shout mingled the roar of forty bullocks which stood chained to stakes around the bonfire, the glare of which and the uproar affrighted the poor animals. But the roar soon ceased ;—butchers placed near the oxen despatched them with their axes preparatory to roasting them at the bonfire. At the same moment the two fountains at the extremities of the piazza began to pour, each from its three dolphins' heads, wines of six different colours. Amidst the rush of the populace to share this refreshment—the groans of the dying beasts—the shouts of the mob—the procession crossed the square, their horses snorting and prancing at the blaze, and slipping as they curvetted in the newly-shed blood.

Notwithstanding these honours, it is probable that Cæsar was not grieved when he had fairly passed through the Orsini quarter, and approached the bridge of Santangelo. Nevertheless it was observed that he turned pale as the river came in sight, and there was something demoniac and wild in his gaze. Some who were looking at him earnestly imagined that it was the recollection of a black deed which writhed within him ; for there—right in front—arose that vast and gloomy pile—the fortress-tomb of the once master of the world,—which had received his brother's disfigured corpse when rescued from the ooze of the Tiber. Others more charitable ascribed his emotion to the contrast thus forced upon him of his own glories with that brother's dismal tragedy ! But his paleness might merely have been the chilling hues of the moon, which had

now risen broad and full in the darkening twilight, and shone over the terraces of the Vatican and the spires of St. Peter—for as yet Michael Angelo had not hung the Pantheon in the air.

All conjectures on this subject were speedily swallowed in others more cogent. The legions of Vitellozzo appeared drawn up, as if in order of battle, in the centre of the square before the bridge, which they ought already to have crossed. Marvelling at a delay which was likely to increase the confusion of the armed masses, the duke's alarms again returned—and there was a fierceness in his eyes when he inquired the matter, which affrighted the soldier to whom he spoke so much that he could not reply. But Vitellozzo almost instantly appeared, and with a countenance by no means so full of regret as his words, informed Cæsar that his Germans refused to lower their standard in homage to that of the church on Santangelo, because the Swiss and Gascons who garrisoned it had set up their own flags on the ramparts below, and it might be construed into a mark of homage to those mercenaries, which their German competitors would not endure. On the other hand the Gascons threatened to discharge their artillery if the Germans passed without the required obeisance; and in this dilemma the captain of Santangelo and himself had agreed to await his grace's commands.

There was a smile of dull malice and hatred on Vitellozzo's face, as if he had reduced the general of the church to a dilemma, which did not escape Cæsar's penetration. And a dilemma it was! It seemed that he must either suffer an insult to be

offered to the sovereignty of the church in her metropolis, before the gaze of Christendom, or exhibit his own weakness in a vain attempt to compel a submission which the proud mercenaries were not likely to yield.

A moment's musing showed Cæsar both these horns of the alternative,—another suggested to him not only an escape, but advantages to be reaped from it.

“Let the captain of Santangelo attend me—methinks I am still the constable! Where is Don Migueloto?” and he glanced round. The Catalan was at hand, following at the head of Cæsar's antique guard. He beckoned to him—the watchful myrmidon was by his side in an instant.

The captain of Santangelo at the same time approached, bearing with him a ring or rather hoop of massive keys, which he probably intended to present, by way of compliment, to the constable.

“What!—or are we mistaken?” said the duke, colouring darkly, as a massive Swiss approached with a spear of the usual vast length of the infantry of that country, then the most famous in Europe. “Pflinger!—whom we forbade ever to appear again in the Roman jurisdiction!—Homicide! what dost thou here?” And suddenly stooping to the astonished Swiss, he snatched the keys, and handed them over his shoulder to Migueloto. “Go with your men,” he continued to the Catalan. “Tell the Swiss and Gascons to meet me instantly on the other side of the bridge, with their standards, to be my escort to the Vatican!—Till then, Germans, let none pass!—

If afterwards they assail you, help yourselves as ye well know in time of need!—And thou, Migueloto, art from this instant my captain of Santangelo.”

The fierce flash of Cæsar’s eye fell upon the discomfited visage of Vitellozzo, and so rueful was its expression, that he laughed aloud, and the whole mass of the spectators laughed in uproarious concert. Ser Niccolò’s worn features gleamed with a satirical and yet melancholy smile.

Vitelli stood for a moment irresolute: he glanced at the Orsini, but they, too, were laughing; he glanced at his mercenaries—they sat wearily on their exhausted steeds—and he laughed also! But the sound of his cacchination suddenly stilled that of the assembly. Something he probably meant to say—perhaps something to do—which would have compromised the newly-restored peace—when suddenly all attention was caught and absorbed in a report which sounded like the explosion of a volcano, and the whole summit of the fortress-sepulchre appeared as if disgorging a sea of flames, which flowed over the battlements in streams of crimson fire!

CHAPTER XV.

“Her face was to mine eye beyond all wonder ;
The rest (hark in thine ears) as black as incest.”

Pericles, Prince of Tyre.

THAT the Swiss and Gascons, in their rage at the orders which Migueloto had probably by this time carried them, had blown up the fortress, was the thought which struck every heart like the blow of a hammer ! The Germans shouted and brought their lances with a loud clash to the rests. But alarm in an instant became wonder, when the lava overflow seemed suddenly to curl up its torrents, and rush upwards even to the sky, forming a pyramid of fire, the base of which was as broad as the immense tower from which it rose. The pyramid itself appeared then to rise in the air, until by some wondrous, and as it seemed to the multitude, magic device, its base rounded, hollowed, and became like a crown of laurels of the purest flame ! Beneath the extraordinary effulgence of this illumination, the river, the fortress, the immense multitude of gazing faces, the towers of the Vatican, the bridge, the galleys,—all

became of red hot hues. But the wonders in store even exceeded these. A black cloud suddenly rushed over the battlements, and sounds as if of a wild tempest were heard, with gleams of lightning darting jaggedly around. The cloud gradually grew thinner and brighter in the middle, until, as if through a veil of crape, the figure of a woman appeared, of great beauty, to judge from the perfect symmetry of the outlines, for the face was averted. Her long black hair flowed wildly on the wind from beneath a crown of polished silver; she wore a black robe, girded at the waist with a silver serpent, and seemed engaged in some mysterious ceremony, waving over her head a branch of an apple tree of gold, with golden fruit.

“In our Lady’s name, what may all this be?” exclaimed Vitellozzo, crossing himself many times, and speaking to the dispossessed Swiss.

“Surely ’tis the work of the sorceress of Santangelo!” replied the aghast castellan.

“Sorceress! what sorceress, idiot?” exclaimed Cæsar, fiercely.

“The nun who is imprisoned there—who was stolen from our lady’s house on Mount Aventine by the pagan sultan, signor!” replied the Swiss, confusedly. “His holiness commanded me not to meddle with her, or by the Holy Cross!——”

“A crown!—and of laurels!—it is Fiamma!” interrupted Cæsar, as if he heard not what was said in his absorption. The populace, perceiving the drift of the flaming allegory, applauded it with a terrific shout, and fired with the gorgeous vision which filled his imagination, Cæsar bent to the people with the

majesty of an emperor receiving his crown. But at the same instant his flushed countenance grew white, his teeth became clenched, his eyes stared wildly and fixedly forward, and his locks were drenched in the dark sweat which streamed down his face.

Luckily, at this instant, the great gate of Santangelo opened, and Migueloto rode out with the Swiss and Gascons following him in sullen silence. The approach of danger seemed to restore the balance to Cæsar's powerful mind. He beckoned to the Swiss captain whom he had just dispossessed of his castellaniship, and observed with a tart smile, "It might be, captain, that you were right—some ill might befall if this mass of cavalry crossed the bridge. Therefore keep it until you have further orders from the most reverend Cardinal of Sienna, your general! We know the Swiss slight cavalry charges, as rocks those of the sea! We will take our royal duchess no farther, with the end that all Christendom should know that we, at least, introduce no women into the Apostolic palace."

The Swiss stared in a disconcerted manner at the duke, and strode hastily over the bridge to his soldiers, who halted at his command, but the Gascons rushed forward to greet Cæsar with loud shouts of joy and welcome. The duke meanwhile glanced round, not expecting that the princess was advanced so far, but her zealous attendants had halted her only a few paces in the rear. The young duchess started the instant her lord's eye fell upon her, and for the first time that day she exercised her will unprompted, and turned her palfrey's head. But the staffers in

gold and crimson who held the bridle checked any further movement, not being able to believe that the princess could in reality mean to do aught unprescribed in the day's programme.

"Ha ! my gallant riders of Perigord at least have not forgotten me !" said Cæsar, mingling among the Gascons, and addressing many of them by nicknames and rude patronymies which it was marvellous how he remembered, since the owners themselves might have been excused if they had forgotten them.

Thus dextrously had Cæsar apparently thrown his enemies into collision, the Swiss indeed not advancing, but seeming to await some hostile movement from the Germans. But Paolo Orsino had hastened back to Vitellozzo, and by his arguments prevailed upon him not to throw the city in the direful commotion which an assault would occasion, and the issue of which would be very doubtful, as the pontiff and the pilgrims would certainly construe the attack into one on themselves. Vitellozzo sullenly consented to remain where he was until Paolo's return, bitterly subjoining, if he had the good fortune ever to do so. The Orsino then hastened to the Swiss captain, and prevailed upon him also to promise that he would take no steps until he received further commands, provided the Germans did not attempt to cross the river.

"What ails them now, thou merry bitterness, thou olives and wine !" said the Knight of St. John, who had formerly spoken to the deformed tailor, and who was again driven by the pressure to the little man's side.

“How many eyes hast thou not to see by his glad countenance that he is bidding his wife ‘God be with her’ till he sees her again?” returned Paschino. “He will say that to her the day before doomsday some day, or old mother Hecate’s drugs will lose their virtue.”

“But wherefore doth she not accompany him to the Vatican?” returned the knight.

“Know you not that the entrance thereof is strictly forbidden to all women—to believe the old songs which they call canons and bulls?” said the tailor.

“Have I not told thee what I have heard—that Donna Lucrezia is to lodge in the palace—doubtless with a female court?” said the knight, sharply.

“‘Ergo te semper cupiet, Lucretia, Sextus!’”

returned the dwarf, rubbing his hands and chuckling as if this black line contained only a witty allusion.

“Paschino! hast thou not told me that certain monks saved thee, being a foundling left on a dunghill before their monastery—taught thee all thy scraps of learning—and dost thou laugh to utter such horrors against the supreme pastor of the church?” said the Hospitaller, with warmth.

“Truly, signor sparkle-beard! I was found by a friar even as you say,” returned the droll. “But who knows who put me on the dunghill? Yet for certain I owe the monks my life—such as it is—perchance for a better reason than picking me up, like a jewel, from the mud!—They who hide can find! But I might forgive them my existence,

inasmuch as the girls around their monastery (I mean the holy brothers on Mount Aventine) are notoriously as tempting and ready as ripe melons!—But why should I forgive them for making a tailor of me—a fellow to line brocades and clip sleeves of the villanous Venice fashion—out of pure envy, lest their gravest doctors should be silenced, confuted, and put to shame, by the learning which might have been added to my natural parts?”

“No wise man whets a knife for his own throat—thou art even too keen already!” returned the Hospitaller. “Moreover, thou knowest that merit was not made to be rewarded in this world.”

“But the prospect is far—beyond the moon!” said the dwarf. “However, I will get me one of those glasses through which they say that the Spaniards have lately seen a new world!—In faith, they do well to lie due west, for there is abundance of room from the Pillars of Hercules to Asia!”

The pressure of the crowd buffeting to accompany the now advancing procession, against the stream which set in to escort the returning bride of Cæsar, quickly separated the gossips. The Knight of St. John urging on his charger to regain the line of procession, with difficulty penetrated the masses of the populace crowding into the square of St. Peter, which was already thronged. Before him was the antique basilica of Constantine—that of Michael Angelo existed as yet only in his vast genius, like the statue in the marble.

The castle of Santangelo had elapsed into darkness, but in recompense the whole Vatican ascent

was one blaze of light. The immense extent of the illuminations revealed that of the palace itself, which resembled rather an irregular city of palaces, of strange and varying architecture—pile after pile, pillars and towers, terraces, balconies, domes, bosomed amidst stately groves and gardens, all glittering with innumerable lamps, whose beams were softened into a silver haze by the white splendour of the moon. In a balcony over the portico of St. Peter, an assemblage of personages in habits whose gorgeousness the blaze of torches revealed, probably marked the spot from which the pontiff was pleased to witness his son's triumphant entry. But the radiance disappeared when the procession had fairly entered the square.

Anxious to witness the meeting of the sire and son, but keeping as much as possible in the rear of the gorgeous train of prelates and nobles, the Hospitaller regained the line of the procession, and was admitted as part of it. The whole pomp passed on in due marshalry to the Sala Regia, and entered it at the same time that from a magnificent staircase at the extremity the pontiff descended. The spectators might have thought that the procession to meet Cæsar must have exhausted the papal court; and yet large groups of gilded officials, and of pilgrims of illustrious rank, lay and clerical, prelates from remote lands, princes, abbots, grand masters of the chief European orders of knighthood, monks, pages, guardsmen, continued to pour down the stairs in attendance on the pontiff.

The Hospitaller's anxiety to behold the pontiff

was great, but he took care to remain so far amidst the throng, that his dark plume was the only piece of his habiliments visible. It needed not the gorgeous pontifical robes, stiff with gems, the blazing tiara, nor the golden keys in his hand, the glistening slippers wrought with the cross in rubies, the little canopy of cloth-of-gold borne over his head, to distinguish the person of Alexander the Sixth. He stood with the majesty of a Jupiter,—his great stature, his large and noble features, the despotism and irascibility of his regards not unsuited to the other characteristics of the son of Saturn. A nearer approach, it might be, dissipated something of this grandeur of person. The workings of age, the traces of furious passions, the lines wrought by care and sorrow, were visible in his countenance, and sometimes gave it, to the eye of the physiognomist, an expression of melancholy and devouring thought, approaching to anguish. Seventy years of ordinary existence leave iron prints; but when the turbulent career of Alexander is considered, his experience of almost all the varieties of fortune and conditions of life, of grief and joy, terror and triumph, struggle and victory, the adamant quality of the soul appeared, which could support that weight of thought with so unbending a majesty.

The personages of Cæsar's procession halted instantly on discovering that of the pontiff's, and filing open, the duke advanced up the passage thus made for him, taking Paolo Orsino familiarly by the arm, and leading him by his side. He looked very pale, but his eye glittered, and his manner was so hurriedly

vivacious that it formed a great contrast to the austere and immovable majesty of the pontiff. The most skilful observer might have been foiled at the marvellous combination of expressions which Alexander's countenance exhibited. Sorrow and pride—suspicion and tenderness—the love of the father with the doubts and fears of the monarch receiving the homage of so formidable a subject—seemed to struggle for the mastery.

Three golden cushions placed by Burciardo at prescribed intervals, the last at some distance from the stairs, marked the spots at which the duke was to pay his kneeling homage. He performed the ceremonial hastily, and when he reached the last cushion, the dean raised his wand, and in a loud voice commanded silence, for there was a great buzz and trampling in the saloon. A hundred ushers echoed the cry—and there was silence.

It was observed that Cæsar, usually so glib of speech, slightly hesitated, for he was now expected to offer his thanks. But with his usual judgment, he spoke to the pontiff in Spanish, an idiom always pleasant to his ears, being that of his native land. “Behold me here, most blessed father!” he said, “to kiss with reverent tenderness your holy feet, and render due thanks for so many honours, for so many benefits conferred on me in this my long absence from your sight, although not from your heart, assuring your sanctity that not for these favours alone, but many others, I profess myself a singularly benefited son of our Holy Mother the church; proof of my everlasting gratitude for which I will give by pledging and

holding my life in the service of the apostolic throne and of the sacred college—in which I glory to have been once counted a brother.”

There was a moment's profound silence, and the pontiff replied, not without some emotion in his tones, and in the same language. “Even until now we have been well content with your actions, and now we receive with satisfaction this attestation in words; which accepting as a pledge of your faith, and of a continual loyal service, we promise you ever to correspond to with greater honours, and rewards. The holy chair needs not dominions and riches to exalt its majesty; but truly for princes to acknowledge its greatness, and to sustain it in the veneration of others, we ask none better than yourself, with the strength with which we shall intrust you, to the confusion of those, who show themselves the more undutiful to us, in proportion to the obligations we heap upon them!”

The latter part of the speech touched many present, and it was with a livid glance at the Orsino that Cæsar advanced to kiss the cross on the pontiff's feet. The honour of saluting his cheek rarely granted to any but sovereigns and the members of the sacred college, was also granted to the duke.

Then rising, Cæsar motioned to the Orsino to advance, and said, with a keen glance at his sire, “None in this presence, holy father, need now feel the sting of your reproach to the unfilial conduct of some! Signor Paolo Orsino lighted on his mishap bringing to your throne the submission and devotion of its chief rebels!”

The young nobleman advanced, and knelt at Alexander's feet, who to the great scandal of the master of the ceremonies, instantly raised him, and kissed both his cheeks. "Welcome, thrice welcome out of the jaws of the whale, beloved son!" he said, with a warmth which could scarcely have been feigned. "Know you not that we were about to draw the sword of St. Peter, and come to the rescue ourself? It were not for the first time we have worn armour, God and our Lady wot well, and the infidel Moors of Granada!"

The Orsino replied with the profound humility and gratitude due to so gracious a speech; and then intreating of his holiness permission to introduce one of his deliverers to his paternal notice, he beckoned to Sir Reginald. The young knight was leaning in mute reverence on the cross of his sword; and although a summons to instant and deadly battle would scarcely have quickened his pulse, he responded to this signal with an awe and perturbation which caused a general smile among the Italians.

"We heard there was one of the brothers of the Holy Sepulchre in it—this is not he?" said the pontiff with great kindness. "Approach, young man, and receive the blessing of heaven for a christian deed."

"Most holy father! I am not worthy!" replied Sir Reginald, devoutly kneeling.

"Yea, and the worthier for thinking so—or but saying so is it with thee too? Yet thy tongue rings with some of the honest discords of beyond sea!"

said Alexander, smiling. "Master John, is he of thy blunt spoken land?"

"I know not whether of Saxony or of France, for methinks, holy father, he is both fish and flesh," replied the master of the ceremonies.

"More of a fish, please you, being an English islander," said Sir Reginald, recovering his natural boldness.

"Ha!—and is your king still wearing away with his consumption?" said the pontiff, eagerly. "Hast thou any commission from him to this blessed festival? for indeed we fear those vast treasures he hath heaped up, will hang like a leaden mountain on his ascending soul!"

"The knight is from Ferrara, where he hath long tarried, holy father," said Cæsar, with some emphasis.

"Ferrara!—How fares it with the good duke?" said the pontiff, with sudden haughtiness of manner. "Methinks—remembering that all his cities and lands have been assumed from the Holy See—he might have honoured us with a special embassy on this occasion!"

"Messer Pietro Bembo is at hand, and perchance is honoured with some such commission?" said Cæsar, suddenly turning, and indicating the canon, who stood, as he thought, secluded among the crowd.

"Most holy father!" said Bembo, somewhat flurriedly, "my master's duty to your paternity is so perfect that to protest it would, he thought, lay it open to suspicion, as for a merchant in diamonds to declare that there was no flaw in the one he offered,

when no judicious eye imagined any!—and therefore I am only here on my devotion to the jubilee.”

Messer Bembo, you are a poet and an Italian—I am a simple man, and a native of Aragon,” replied Alexander, sharply; for, in common with the other descendants of the warlike barbarians of the north, he entertained a profound contempt for the Italians.

“I also, holy father, am three parts Italian!” said the Duke of Romagna, with this dextrous move turning the general though silent resentment of the Italians at his father’s contemptuous speech to his own favour.

The pontiff smiled. “Ay, nephew,—a Roman!” he said, but still with a tinge of contempt. “That was a fine name once, when the Colosseum stood whole—ere the Gothic fathers of Spain beheld it!—But we heard that the Lord of Città di Castello was with you: where is he now?”

“He came—with a thousand lanzknechts, to share your paternal absolution!” said Cæsar, emphatically; “who are also the cause why I have been compelled to send my own guard into Santangelo, and withdraw the Swiss and Gascons.”

“Say you so?” exclaimed Alexander, with strong and evidently unpleasant surprise.

“The Germans are proud—Vitellozzo could not compel them to lower their standard before those of the Swiss, who threatened else to discharge their ordnance at us!” said the Orsino, very eagerly.

“What! do my Swiss, too, mutiny?—Where is Pffinger?” said Alexander, with a sudden darkening which betokened a storm.

“I have broken the slave!—he was one of the plunderers in the bandy-legged’s army—of King Charles, I would say!” said the duke, hastily.

“Then, son, you know not that we have given him and his followers plenary remission of the same—is it not so, Gian-Battista?” said the pontiff, turning to the Datary.

“And moreover your holiness was pleased to remit to them the expenses of the bull,” replied the minister, in a grave and disapproving tone.

“’Tis, perchance, as well as it hath happened—Santangelo should be in sure hands at this season!” said the duke, with a significant glance. “And considering the strange words spoken by the Lord of Castello in the camp before Faenza, he is as well lodged on the farther side of the river.”

“It was his passion, holy father, and a helmet-full of the thick wine of that country, which he had just drained, that spoke, not Vitellozzo!” said the Duke of Gravina, vehemently.

“The Lords Orsini are indeed good testimony, for they were all around him when he announced his hope to thrust your holiness from the chair of St. Peter!” said Cæsar, in a mild and interceding tone.

“Your holiness was once a soldier, and must needs remember how the blood maddens in triumph!” said Paolo, with a mixture of humility and haughtiness.

“Triumph!—ay, in a field gained against the majesty of Heaven and our own!” exclaimed Alexander, impetuously. “But yet we distinguish!—rebellion with the Orsini is a disease, a healthful exercise with the Vitelli!—let it pass! And now, nephew,

hasten to pay your adorations at the shrine of St. Peter, where the Penitentiary will hear your confession, and receive your offering."

"But first, it is most needful that the Orsini induce their friends to retire from Santangelo, and that I provide for the quartering of my troops, lest mischief or confusion happen!" said the duke; an intimation which at such a moment was of peculiar emphasis.

"Hast thou many with thee, Cæsar?" said the pontiff, turning with a vague expression of anxiety and suspicion. "We bade you not burden the city at this time, when we are obliged to open our ancient stores, lest the faithful should lack corn in the land of promise!"

"Chiefly the barons of the Campagna with their retinues, and a sprinkling of honest Catalans," replied Cæsar, carelessly.

"Look you, duke, we will have no quartering on this side Tiber, unless it be beyond the Isle,—and to prevent quarrels, we will make room for the Swiss in the Vatican," continued the pontiff, who had for a moment been lost in thought. "The Cardinal of Sienna will consult with you as to the disposal of the rest."

The duke bowed with a smile of mock deference to the venerable priest. "I am glad your holiness has given me a colleague whose integrity not all the devil showed Our Lord could tempt," he said, relapsing into an air of gloom and sorrow; "For grievous indeed it is to punish traitors with the severity they compel—and my heart yet aches to think of the black ingratitude and treason which I have re-

warded in Don Ramir, the podestà, in whom your holiness, the sacred college, and myself trusted so much !”

“The podestà of Romagna !” exclaimed the pontiff, turning slightly pale.

“Has not the news of his treason and punishment ran before us to Rome ?” said Cæsar, with affected astonishment.

“What hath happened to him ?” demanded the pontiff hastily.

“He is beheaded and quartered—halved, I should say—in Ronciglione ! The particulars of his treason I reserve for your holiness’s private audience !” returned the duke, with perfect tranquillity.

It was evident that this news was received with a strong internal shock by the pontiff, and the Cardinal of Sienna crossed himself aghast. But suffering few signs of his emotion to appear, Alexander said, after a short pause, “A matter like this brooks no delay—we will hear your reasons instantly : meanwhile, Lord Paolo, return and prevent any occasion of an outbreak, by bidding the Swiss attend us here, and the Vitelli to retire to their quarters.”

Then stretching his arms, the whole assembly knelt, and uttering a hasty benediction, the pontiff remounted the staircase followed by the duke and his immediate attendants.

The gorgeous court dissolved as rapidly as the coloured clouds of sunset when the luminary has disappeared ; but the Hospitaller watched the departure of the Orsini before he left the palace. He then hastened out, as he imagined, unobservedly, but sud-

denly his mantle was respectfully touched, and Bembo joined him on the steps of the portico.

“My lord, the Orsini are searching for you everywhere, earnestly desiring your presence in their palace, and have left me on the watch to secure you!” said the canon, breathlessly.

“But, Messer Pietro, I intend not to harbour with the Orsini,” replied the prince. “Thou knowest I have an errand—a vow—in this city, which is not likely to be executed in the palace of the betrothed of Lucrezia Borgia!—Tell them that I am fulfilling a sacred obligation of my order—and sacred ’tis! But to my brother, Reginald, say—that even thus unknown, and with the purpose in my heart,—I will not drink the wine of a man who might be—whom the ignorant world might call—my enemy—my rival!”

“Not go to the Orsini palace, where we should be so safe—so royally entertained!” said the canon, ruefully.

“Nay, I mean not to take thee from the flesh-pots, Pietro!” said the knight, smiling: “the rather that thy presence there will serve for a blind to my proceedings; but thou mayest see me at thy pleasure, for I intend to strike my staff at yonder hostelry;—dost thou not mark it in the middle of the square, with the shields of certain Knights of Almaine glittering among the vines of the trellis, and a peasant in a crimson cap dancing with some blue petticoat or another before it?”

“Your highness’s prejudices are, then, in nowise shaken?” said the canon, very disappointedly. “So beautiful a lady, too, that Paris would have preferred

her to Helen, and given her the apple rather than to Cytherea !”

“ ’Tis the heavier confirmation—there is no virtue nor villany which such beauty might not cause !” replied the prince, vehemently, but suddenly checking himself with a sigh.

“ But, my lord,” said the canon, “ I have it in charge from the redoubted prince your father, and may not lose sight of you even for the space of a wink. Where you go, I go ; and so, lead on, signor !”

“ Art thou dealing with a child, or with a man, deemest thou, sir canon ?” said the knight, sternly. “ Refuse the Orsini if thou wilt, but we may not shelter together, for already I note thou art suspected as an envoy from my father. Thou hast my command, which it is thine to obey, not discuss ; and so, a fair good night, Messer Pietro ! I am not angry with you, but would be alone.”

And turning from him, the knight retraced his way to the place where he had left his horse and squire ; but at some distance he looked back, and consoled the canon with a friendly wave of farewell. Perceiving that his dismissal was peremptory, the ecclesiastic determined to make the best of his situation, mounted his mule, and rode towards the palace on the Tiber inhabited by the Duke of Gravina and his son.

CHAPTER XVI.

“ Geryon, arise ! and Gorgon,
Chimæra, and thou Sphinx, subtlest of fiends,
Who ministered to Thebes Heaven’s poisoned wine,
Unnatural love, and more unnatural hate,
These shall perform your task.”

SHELLEY.

THE masses assembled to witness the entry of the general of the church were gradually dispersing ; the nobles and vassals to fortified palaces, the mercenary soldiers to their quarters, the oppressed but dazzled and satisfied populace to their hovels and desolate homes among the ruins of the grandeur of their marvellous ancestry. As if watching the gradual sinking of the city into calm, two persons slowly paced up and down the ramparts of St. Angelo, on the side beneath the round tower which overlooked the river, one keeping slightly behind with the respect of an inferior, though engaged in an apparently confidential dialogue.

“ But still, my lord, if I might speak, these illuminations of Santangelo passed the displays of human art ! ” said Migueloto, for it was he accompanying the Duke of Romagna. “ Donna Fiamma

affected indeed to use the service of your faithful Gascons and of the Turkish slaves, but there are some who report they saw strange grisly forms of brightness and darkness mingled, which flew about, obeying her behests."

"Ay, the vulgar deem everything great beyond the power of humanity—measuring it by their own base incapacities!" replied Cæsar. "But if she has discovered secrets!—what then?—Was not Pope Silvester II. a potent magician? Yea, and Benedict the Ninth, and Gregory the Seventh, and holy Dunstan? But, Migueloto, seeing how I managed mine enemies to-day, deem you that I need the sleeve of Hildebrand from which he shook out thunder and lightning?—or the flute of Benedict, with which he enchanted women to follow him over wilds and wolds, seeing how the lofty spirit of Fiamma bows down before me, like flame indeed beneath a magician's wand?"

"God's life! my lord, what hope can she have remaining but from your gracious favour?" exclaimed the captain.

"Yea, and she loves me, pretty soul!" said Cæsar, with a scornful smile; but he added in a darker tone, "And she alone, perchance, of all the beauteous fools who have told me so!—Surely, Migueloto, I am a deep Platonic, seeking as I perpetually do the ideal of beauty, and finding only disappointment in all its forms!"

"Signor, in my opinion, for I am not versed in the schoolmen's, my lady, Donna Lucrezia, approaches the nearest to the perfection of all love-

liness," said the captain, starting to observe that his superior suddenly paused, as if he had seen a snake in his path.

"Why, thou repeatest a common tale!" he said, almost instantly resuming his pacing, but more rapidly. "Is she not as famous in Italy as Helen in Greece?—Ay, and more than famous—for men's blame spreads wider than their praise, thou knowest, Migueloto; else how chances it that all thy deeds of arms are outblazoned by thy deeds of guile, for the Romans call you cut-throat oftener than soldier, Migueloto!—But is it not strange that my father, who desires so earnestly that I should doat on my gewgaw of a bride, encourages Fiamma in her pranks?"

"Is it not strange, too, that Donna Lucrezia is to lodge in the sacred palace?" returned the confidant.

"It shall be stranger yet, if this precaution furnishes not a more blasting mildew than any yet distilled on her renown—alas!" said the duke, and he continued his walk for some time without speaking.

"Where is Fiamma now?" he said at last.

"Practising some incantation with the haggish sisters of the Ghetto, in the tomb," said Migueloto, glancing at the huge round tower which he thus designated. "I do believe, some love-spell to lure your highness back to your old worship."

"Then shall I begin to deem they have some science beyond their father's skill in the black herbs of death, which he left them for an inheritance when

he treated himself one day to a draught of one of his own compounds," said Cæsar, gaily. "For indeed I feel as if mine ancient love were rekindling from its ashes in my heart.—Methinks I loved her once, before I loved ambition! But hast thou heard of one whom I bade attend me here in Santangelo, a wizard whose skill mocks theirs to clouds and vapours—one Dom Sabbat?"

"My lord, no,—I have not been many hours captain of Santangelo," returned Migueloto.

"Migueloto," said the duke, suddenly stopping and turning with an expression of fierce scrutiny on his captain, "I think thou dost often strangely mistake me—wherefore deemest thou that I am animated by so persevering and exterminating a hate of these husbands and these wooers of my sister?"

"Because—because—the fiend carry me if I know!—unless that your grace deems all unworthy of your future grandeur," said Migueloto, shuddering beneath the serpent eyes which yet fascinated his own.

"Partly so," replied Cæsar, in a gratified tone; "but also because that the sorcerer—this Dom Sabbat—who showed to me my own imperial fortunes, at the same time raised for me the phantoms of my sister's descendants,—and they were all crowned with diadems, whose glory methought even outglared the lustre of Charlemagne's!—And deem you that I will suffer, if I can prevent it, the wreath which I must acquire with toils and cares so mighty, to pass away from the succession which I hope to leave behind me?"

"It were not reasonable," replied the captain. "But indeed I marvel his holiness is not weary of marrying her to these husbands that die so fast!"

"'Tis no ill means to refute report, and his holiness values the breath of men which they call opinion,—these espousals dazzle the aim of suspicion!" replied Cæsar, with dark significance. "This, at least, I would have all friends of mine reply to conjecturers!—and this Orsini match is to be paraded before the eyes of Christendom. But there may be a deeper policy in it! I have had ill offices done me with his holiness—he takes Remiro's tidings very strangely!—and Lucrezia—but who can give reasons for women's doings? Let the mob believe even the worst they will, for, Migueloto, an emperor and a pope cannot sit throned together in Rome!" but observing the gloom on the superstitious captain's face, he continued: "Tush, man, I am but jesting now—albeit the chair of St. Peter was at first of very plain wood! I would only do what many Christian men have earnestly desired these latter times! What say you, if I called into counsel the ascetic, Lanfranchi, who would strip the church as naked as she was born, and turn her out of Constantine's doors as meek and ragged, holy and beggared, as she entered it? So great a service might win Heaven's pardon for many little malefactions; and besides 'tis in my thought some day to redeem the holy sepulchre from the infidels. And that minds me:—what has become of our Knight Hospitaller all to-day?"

"I know not, signor, I saw him but once in the procession," replied Migueloto.

"'Tis a very silent gentleman—I must have farther news of him," said the Duke, musingly. "A sullen fellow, too!—marked you his ungracious acceptance of Lucrezia's thanks? But, softly, we must take order for the safety of the city! The good Cardinal of Sienna it seems withdraws his gray beard from our discussions."

"Those tidings of the *double* podestà told well in there," replied Migueloto.

"But also didst thou observe how the Datary started when I communicated the news to *him*?" returned the duke. "He hath done me good service—but wherefore did he start?"

"Unless that he feared the like, having the like treachery in his heart," said the amiable castellan.

"Then had he cause," replied Cæsar.

"Our two she-apothecaries are not, I warrant them, out of their stock of herbs, though there is a brisk trade in them, and the grisly women are said to be so monstrously rich, that but that they are witches too, they had long since been murdered," said Migueloto.

"Ay, but these herbs are dangerous, and require too heavy sums in purchasing the treachery necessary to their administration, to be used on vulgar occasions. The brawlers of Vitellozzo,—the insolent vassals of the Orsini,—merit no such pains. Besides, these sudden deaths are suspected!—I want some stout knaves ready to strike with the open steel, so that folks may lay the blame on chaffering cups,—or to throw a rogue into the Tiber without much splashing—thou knowest some such?"

“My lord, the Cardinal of Sienna has issued a decree of banishment to all the banditti in Rome,” said the captain, evasively.

“Why, so has the consistory issued a decree of deposition to all the tyrants of Romagna!” returned the duke, laughing tartly. “Tut, captain, where didst thou find the men who met Lucrezia’s last husband on the steps of St. Peter?”

“The bungling villains! that gave him a dozen wounds, yet not one mortal!—and left it for a poor gentleman (but yet a gentleman) of your grace’s, to strangle him in his bed, after all!” said the captain, grumblingly.

“That minds me,—art thou certain yonder fool of the ceremonies did not note you on that occasion?” said Cæsar. “He is the very ass to listen to a message of state compliment, and was it not with some such folly you got admittance to the boaster’s bed of sickness? I do oft mark some strange significance in his eyes!”

“If I thought so!” said Migueloto, with a short but most emphatic pause, during which the throat of the sapient master of the ceremonies ought to have smarted. “But as I persuaded him I came from his holiness—all I did he imagines to be done by an authority which he would as soon think of misdoubting, as one brought direct from Heaven by the archangel Gabriel, with his gold and white wings beating the air into sparkles of silver.”

“Thou ravest, Migueloto, or art turned poet!” exclaimed Cæsar, with a derisive smile.

“Nay, my lord, I was but remembering the

limning of the Annunciation in the Church of the Hermits of Mount Aventine," replied the matter-of-fact captain.

"Thou rememberest it to a good purpose," returned the duke, absently. "How many wounds didst thou say? It must have made his mother weep to hear the tale,—sad as a grandmother's, when the fox has been in her henroost! But he who had been Lucrezia's husband—who boasted that he would love her so, that she should perforce at last love him, (and 'tis like enough, for the passion of women is for the most part, Migueloto, but the warm reflection of the flame of ours,—spiritual, mark you, radiance and heat without the material earthiness!—why dost thou stare? Know you not how many hours I wasted, ravelling the subtleties of the angelic and seraphic doctors?)—What were we discoursing?—He had a pretty fancy at a glowing description, that Aragonian; and, mercy on us! how he would rave of her beauty, till men were faint with rage to hear him prate! And yet I say, did I say it before?—he died not ill in the flush of youth, and wine, and triumph—that husband of Lucrezia!"

"It must have gone nigh to madden her grace's adorers, to hear the boy gabble!" said Migueloto, with his disgusting smile.

"They were mad already to be so! but who is sane?—To my thought, few but honest labourers whistling after their ploughs, and puzzling their brains in nowise either with the carcasses or souls of their fellows!" returned Cæsar. "But of what spoke we? Ay, truly,—come—your old friends the

banditti?—They are not so completely banished from Rome as thou wouldst have me think.”

“Perchance—it may be—that John of the Catacombs still lingers in some of his old haunts,” said the captain reluctantly, but under the eye of Cæsar even he could not lie.

“I’ll warrant, then, he hath as many of his worthy coadjutors at whistle, as might set all Rome in a blaze, and cut throats by the light?”

“More than enow to plunder the whole city, and all the pilgrims in it, if taken at unawares,” replied the captain, with a sudden kindling of enthusiasm.

“Why, thou dunderheaded Catalan! what manner of policy were it to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs?” said Cæsar, laughing. “I would but know on what I may depend—in case of the worst—in case the pope persists in his purpose of defeating all my plans, by wedding his daughter to the chief of the rebellious barons!—Marked you how warmly he received him—how mistrustfully me? Some have done me marvellously ill offices with our holy father, whispered, no doubt,—by our Lady, when he cried, ‘Welcome, Cæsar!’ his eyes were full of recollections of—Francesco!”

“John of the Catacombs might perchance be found by a good pair of eyes, in Rome, for he cannot read, and the edict is posted up in Latin!” said Migueloto, with increasing interest.

“’Tis enough, if we know where to find him at the time of need,” replied the duke, thoughtfully. “A tumult raised by them were dangerous. And after this quarrel between the Swiss and Germans, our

holy father must see a necessity for my troops to occupy all the chief points of vantage in the city, against the brigands, thou knowest, for John must let us hear the sharpening of his knife. And, Migueloto, all the points of strength but this castle, which we hold as it were merely by a trick of chance, are occupied by his holiness's Spaniards,—good and faithful men, 'tis true,—but not so devoted to us as to save our house from the snare even in despite of its short-sighted chief!—But no more of this—I had something of more instant urgency. Migueloto, 'tis a pity thou hast no scholarship—else thou mightst read this list, furnished me by the Datary, of the names and biding places of the captains or other agents of the black bands who are now in Rome, to obtain remissions for themselves and their brethren, of all the mortal sins, and more than all, a thousandfold repeated.”

“What would such clerkship service me in, my lord?” said Migueloto, somewhat surprisedly.

“Nay, it would only service me, who shall, as it is, be compelled to read it to thee,” replied Cæsar, carelessly. “For I would have thee use some secret diligence to understand how these religious freebooters stand affected towards me,—whether any would be willing to join the standard of the church,—in especial of those now in the service of the barons or the lords of Naples,—to obtain full absolution (which shall else be clogged with conditions) and ample pay.”

“I know not, signor,—I know not that they would believe me, if I offered more than they already drain

out of the lords who employ them," said the captain, dubiously eyeing his chieftain.

"But if those lords were all gone, (and the best of us die some day,) would they not need a new master, and were it not well to be of the first in the market?" replied Cæsar. "Moreover,—canst thou not repeat to them some of the fine songs I have sung to thee—concerning yon shower of ducal bonnets and princes' feathers—golden spurs and earls' baldrics—in especial to the Swiss captains, whose beggarly peasant sovereignties give none;—and to the Germans, that bestow so many that every man who is not at the least a belted knight holds himself for wronged and cheated of a birthright?"

"Would your highness have me then to tamper even with his holiness's retainers?" said Migueloto, following at a slower and more reluctant step the sharp exercise of his superior.

"Would your captainship ever desire to be of a loftier title?" returned Cæsar, pettishly. "But what manner of boggling fool art thou?—Dost think I mean to tear up mine own root—for what is Cæsar Borgia but a poor graftling of an aged priest's power? Go to, go to.—Dost think that the prime of the church's ministers, the Datary himself, would aid in my projects if they meant aught but the good of the church?"

"Your highness, then, does not mistrust him—for all he started when he heard of Don Remiro's mischance?" said the captain, with the rancour of one favourite against another.

"I look on all that folks are busy at with a hun-

dred eyes," said the duke quietly; "and that reminds me—I must have a good intelligencer among the Orsini. Poor Agnolo is gone, it seems?"

"Old Gravina was pleased to take it into his head that it was he informed you of his son's intent to visit Rome, and so hung him from his palace weather-cock, whence he was taken down but to-day, when they got matters prepared for your triumphant reception," said the captain, laughing drily, and not without some reason.

"This whey-faced lover, his son, will persuade him out of that belief, were it nailed in his mind like a bad coin on a Jew's change-table," said Cæsar. "But meanwhile the poor man is certainly at rest, and we must find some one to supply his place.—That was an excellent artifice of the Greeks, when they maltreated Sinon, and so got him entrance into Troy!—What if thy John of the Catacombs set upon some fellow of my choosing near the Orsini palace, and suffered him to escape into it for refuge?"

"A goodly plan, my lord," replied the captain; "and then, under some pretext of gratitude, to enter that noble family's service?"

"Oh, nimble wit, but thou art apprehensive!" said Cæsar, with a burst of ironical admiration. "It were not amiss, too, that we had one or two more observers about my fair sister, for in this time of universal festival and far-comers we shall have even as many lovers glistening in her beauty as motes in the sunbeams."

"Nay, my lord, we have never yet been deceived by babbling Fra Biccocco, who learns everything

from her confessor, Lanfranchi, on whom he ever attends," said the captain. "I marvel how so wise and so gloomy a man can trust so much to such a shallow-brained, gossiping, wine-bibbing babbler."

"Why so do I!" said Cæsar, in a somewhat startled tone. "And yet, no,—'tis a great refreshment for men of dark and melancholy genius to divert their fancies at times with these empty wits, for they are ordinarily also light and volatile as corks in water. Yet is Fra Bruno a monk of strange demeanour, that might have been a bishop, and prefers to be still a barefooted friar!"

"Doth not that demonstrate in him, my lord, a poor and grovelling spirit, and by no means to be misdoubted?" said the captain, with the implicit curiosity of one expecting an oracle, which indeed the extraordinary penetration of Cæsar frequently gave forth. "'Tis for that reason of his humility and holy unconcern in this world's business, that I ever go to him when my breast hath need of a bitter purgative to be at any rest!"

"Darest thou go to *him* with any secret of mine in thy breast, as thou callest thy fleshy corslet below the steel?" said Cæsar, with sudden fierceness.

"Nay, my lord, for no Christian is bound to confess the sins of another, and all that I do in your grace's service I leave to your reckoning," replied Migueloto, in a timid or rather frightened tone.

"Do as thou wilt, for that," said Cæsar, pacified by the avowal of this strange principle of morality. "But thou art right in thinking either that this Dominican is without ambition, or hath so much that all the gratifications yet offered to it are beneath

its aim!—Enough of that; I will find fellows to creep about where I would have them! But, hark thee, captain, I would have thee, when thou art again fearful to forget thy sins in their multitude, to carry them to some other confessional than Lanfranchi's,—for I do misdoubt that thy peccadilloes are so closely inwoven with mine that thou must occasionally show the woof by the threads,—and the fox needs but half a cackle!”

“But, my lord, I cannot sleep at times!” said Migueloto, imploringly.

“Then lie awake, and plot more mischief, like thy betters!” returned the duke, jocosely. “Tut, man, go to some jolly, round-faced friar, like Fra Biccocco, who lives and will let live, and sets men on no such foolish penances as I have seen thee perform standing in frozen steel of a winter's night, muttering thy paternosters to the crows on the ramparts.”

“But it seems to do my soul good, my signor, and I feel no comfort when I am set to easy shrift; for sins like mine, they know not their trade that pardon on a small matter,” said the pious captain of Santangelo.

“Soul!—dost thou believe in these monkish dreams, and darest to be the thing thou art!” returned Cæsar, with sudden impatience. “But,” he added with a sardonic smile, “thou hast not been with me in the schools of Padua, where they weigh, and sift, and decompose what thou callest soul—thought—brain—into dust and lime and water.”

“What avails that, my lord, when none of them can compound again, long-bearded doctors though they be, dust, and lime, and water, into what I call

brain—thought—soul ?” replied the captain, sorrowfully.

“Why, now, thou talkest not altogether like a thick-skulled Catalan as thou art!” said the duke, somewhat staggered by this reply. “But my beautiful Fiamma’s spell works. Go then and set the watch. I will in to greet her with a soldier’s kiss, and she coy me not, which is ever woman’s trick when she hath her own wishes before her, like fiends evoked by a fearful magician.”

“Shall I warn her of your highness’s approach ?” said the captain.

“No, no ; I never send heralds to bid folks be in readiness to cheat me—which women besides but rarely need,” returned the duke ; who, like all rogues past, present, and to come, was an infinite vilifier of the fair descendants of Eve.

He then leisurely ascended a flight of narrow steps up a bastion of the tower, and entered at a still narrower doorway, followed by Don Migueloto de Murviedro.

Passing through a series of apartments furnished in a style of massive but antique grandeur,—perhaps with relics of the magnificence of the two profligate women who in the tenth century lorded over Rome from this fortress, or of the Orsini who had usurped it as their own during the eleventh and twelfth ; the duke and his captain descended by a succession of winding stairs and corridors, which communicated with similar suites used for various purposes of residence or imprisonment. All the principal points of access or egress to these chambers were now guarded by

sentinels from the Borgian guard, whose remote lamps and the gleam of the bright night sky through deep shafts rather than windows, perforated in the thickness of the walls, afforded the only light which they thought proper to use.

“Who are thy chief prisoners?—Hast thou yet had time to inquire?” said the duke, as they descended through these dark labyrinths.

“I am not, I trow, to consider my lady Fiamma as one, albeit she be imprisoned on so heinous an accusation that being a nun she became the infidel sultan’s leman?” said Migueloto, with a grin, the sneering malignity of which was concealed by the gloom, or he had not dared to indulge his features in it.

“That is as I shall find her humour disposed; for I will have no whimpering wantons wailing after me,” returned the duke. “But go on—who lodges above?”

“Jacomo Caetano, the apostolic prothonotary, brother to Nicholas, that was strangled by your lordship’s justice at Sermoneta,” replied the captain. “They say he is crazed, and spends the whole live-long day with his hooked nose at the bars of his chamber, looking up to Heaven, as if he expected some visitor thence.”

“Let him look on; there is enough of the blue sky for us all to stare at,” replied Cæsar. “But where does Monsignor Florida keep his state, that forged the dispensation for the heiress of Portugal to wed,—or doth he deny it as obstinately as ever?”

“He retracts his confession, my lord, into which

he says he was cajoled by your grace's emissary, under terror of torture and death."

"The more shame to him that yielded!—But what music is that we hear, which seems to come from the grottoes to our left?" said Cæsar.

"'Tis the musician Tomasino, who, for the love of his lady, Caterina Sforza, whom your lordship was then besieging in Forlì, endeavoured the sacrilegious murder of his holiness with poisoned letters," returned Migueloto. "They have left him his flute, and as the grottoes are dark as night nearly all day, he has no other amusement but to play on it."

"What say you!—Tomasino, and alive!" exclaimed Cæsar.

"His holiness was pleased to spare his life in consideration of the eminent courage he showed in attempting his own, for the sake of his native town and mistress!" returned the captain.

"He breathes into his reed so utter a hopelessness and anguish that to gibbet him were to do him a kindness—so let the sacrilegious parricide live on!" said the Borgia. "But this place is very dark, my Migueloto, and by the cold damp air I should say we were nigh the entrance to some cavern or vault."

"We shall have light enough soon, my lord, although certes it were not ill if I returned above for a lamp, that you might see the curious devices on the walls," said Migueloto, with a slight shudder. "This is the gallery which leads to the sepulchral chamber of the emperors, where we shall find Donna Fiamma, for there she chiefly pursues her studies in

the black art, and, as they say, can raise the devil at her will—all holy saints keep us from harm, and absolve our wretched souls!—But there are not wanting some who aver that she has made the great stone head in the corridor speak, and brought the ghost of Emperor Adrian out of his stone coffin, whose lid no earthly force can open!”

“Lead on, lead on, and cease thy nursery babble,” said Cæsar, in a contemptuous tone, which, despite the vigour of his mind and his scepticism, was assumed, for the general belief in magic and necromancy was, as we have seen, abundantly shared by that strangely compounded intellect. But at the same moment one of the sudden suspicions natural to so dark a fancy struck him, that perhaps his captain meditated some treachery, and was leading him into the reach of ambushed assassination! He started back—drew his dagger—and but that at the instant he beheld a distant glow in the ground of the earthen gallery, round and deep, as if arising from a well, the worthy captain himself might have been in no better plight than the imperial ghost whose enforced re-appearances he had alluded to.

“Return and bring me a lamp; yonder light will guide me the rest of my way,” said Cæsar, concealing his dagger in his cloak as he brushed past the captain, who with a profound bend, which was scarcely to be discerned in the murky twilight, obeyed.

CHAPTER XVII.

“There is a snake in thy smile, my dear ;
And a bitter poison within thy tear.”

SHELLEY.

CÆSAR proceeded with cautious steps and keen glances forward to the place of radiance, the gallery gradually becoming illuminated with a red reflection, which glowed on the lofty walls, covered in parts with hieroglyphics and rich carvings in marble, in others defaced, and revealing the granite foundations of the pile. The mutilated remains of many of the mysterious forms of Egyptian superstition gave a terrible and preternatural aspect to the ruins around, and marked the origin of that colossal and gloomy magnificence which distinguishes all the labours of Adrian, and is alike to be discovered in the ruins of his palace and of his tomb. The unchangeable nature of man might have been bitterly bemused by a philosopher who had marked the scornful glance with which Cæsar surveyed the ruins of a grandeur meant to be perpetual—himself at the same time devoured by an ambition which perhaps the possession of the tomb-maker’s empire could not have satisfied !

A circular hole now appeared in the earth, resembling a well of light; but a massive pillar of granite arose in its centre, into which the arches of the vaulted chamber below converged, and so intricately, that it was some moments before Cæsar discerned that the pillar was hollow, and set with steps which wound like a corkscrew in it, and doubtless down to the vault. Meanwhile he was occupied in considering the extraordinary scene below, as visible through the ruined dome which had once covered this *sanctum sanctorum* of grandeur, the sepulchre of the masters of the world.

At a considerable depth below appeared an extensive chamber, excavated seemingly in the volcanic rock on which the foundations of the castle are laid, vast masses of which, wrought with hieroglyphics and the mystic ornaments of Egyptian architecture, reposed on the heads of gigantic caryatides hewn in the solid rock, whose features bore that expression of malicious and mocking profundity remarkable in Egyptian statues, and which seems to conceal an explanation of the great enigmas of human existence. Behind these colossal guardians of the secrets of death—to judge by the hollow darkness—extended grottoes or subterraneous corridors.

A great fire, apparently of innocuous flames, for it burned with extraordinary splendour in a gigantic sarcophagus without emitting smoke or consuming a figure of wax which reposed in the midst of it, shed lurid glares from the summit of a kind of altar, supported by couching sphinxes. Cæsar smiled, but not without some secret inquietude, when he imagined he

recognised in this fire-wrapped form a very strong resemblance to his own person and features.

On the breast of the figure was a skull, in which was a substance resembling either a human heart or that of some animal of similar organization, recently torn from the breast in which it had been wont to beat. Two ancient hags were busied in continually ladling this skull full of the beautiful flames in the sarcophagus, or in feeding them with strange ingredients which were heaped in their reach. Phials of eastern configuration were there, filled with curious oils, naphtha, and fluids unknown to the modern pharmacopœia, inventions chiefly of Arabian and Greek chemists in the pursuit of sciences abhorred then, and despised now, and which were supposed to possess magic or cabalistical virtues known only to the initiated. Bundles of herbs, chiefly of the dreary plants alien to human life, which grow in churchyards or in ruins, such as hemlock, nightshade, ivy, vervain, and yew, were mingled with the most precious drugs of remote lands, of India and of Iceland. Mosses covered with the froth of an insect which was then supposed to be raised by the direct influence of the moon; glittering dust of gold and pounded diamonds; a multitude of still stranger ingredients, such as bats, hearts of doves, snakes, lizards, toads, select portions of other reptiles and of ferocious beasts; a pile of what seemed to be *eyes*; the head of a mummy, which one of the haggard attendants occasionally rasped into a fine powder over the supplies of fuel; and an infinite variety of the most beautiful flowers, composed the extraordinary preparations.

The malicious and enigmatical faces of the sphinxes and caryatides, which brightened and darkened with the wavering of the flames, as if at times about to utter their secrets, relapsing as suddenly into profound and impenetrable gloom,—seemed rather a repetition than a contrast to the living countenances of the two weird women who superintended the rite. Cæsar immediately recognised in them two female apothecaries, Jewesses of the Ghetto, commonly styled *Notte* and *Morta*—Night and Death,—as well from the indistinct traditions which yet survived in the popular mind of the properties of those ancient divinities, as from peculiarities in their personal appearance. Both were tall and large-boned; both aged, and yet of remarkable bodily strength and agility; both hideously ugly; but *Notte*'s skin was of a singularly dark leaden colour, and *Morta*'s framework of mortality was so gauntly developed and fleshless that she resembled a breathing skeleton, and amply answered the idea raised by her designation.

It was currently reported in Rome, that the oldest inhabitant remembered these women old in his youth. Their real name was unknown, or forgotten in the universality of their nicknames, to which they themselves answered without hesitation or apparent dislike. Their father was said to have been a Jewish physician of transcendent skill, which he was supposed to owe to a compact with the fiend, who, after serving him for a certain number of years, deserted him and suffered him to fall into abject poverty. Some indeed did not scruple to assert that the devil himself was the parent of these sisters,

who, after instructing them in many hellish arts, set them up with an ample stock of poisonous drugs, and left them to make the best of it.

More enlightened or more sceptical persons, however, there were, who disbelieved in this legend, or explained it by the fact that, in his old age, the sage had betaken himself to the study of the occult sciences, and in their toilsome pursuit had worn out both his intellect and his wealth. In these sciences he was said to have had for indefatigable pupils and co-labourers his two daughters, who thus acquired their skill in drugs and chemicals, and, if report might be trusted, in darker and criminal arts. He left them extremely destitute, to all appearances, at his death, but it was now generally believed that, although continuing to live in a state of abject poverty, the sisters were possessed of great wealth—the profits of their unearthly traffic. It was wonderful that, with this mingled reputation, they had hitherto escaped the notice of the ecclesiastical tribunals especially appointed to take cognizance of such delinquencies. It was muttered that they had powerful though secret protectors, to whose vengeance their accursed arts had been serviceable; and as everything evil was supposed to have some natural alliance with the Borgias, it was rumoured that the rapacious Datary himself had been several times restrained from laying his inquisitorial hands upon them, by Cæsar's interposition. If so, they owed to science what might be considered to counterbalance the great injury it had inflicted upon them in causing the peculiar hideousness of their countenances and per-

sons, for it was said that the old physician, their father, by a failure in a wonderful elixir, which he had concocted and given to their mother, in the confidence that it would render her unborn offspring extremely beautiful, caused her death and the untimely birth of a pair of frightful twins.

But Cæsar's eye scarcely glanced over these fearful and disagreeable objects, ere it rested on a form which, although not without a mixture of the terrible in its beauty, displayed even in its disorder of apparel and look much to attract the gaze of the sensual Borgia. It was a woman of fine stature, her features carved with the sculpturesque regularity which Roman beauty still retains, and distinguished by a haughty and fiery expression, suiting a descendant of the ancient masters of the world. She was attired in a long black robe, girdled with a silver serpent, loosened as if to allow room for the tempestuous heavings of her bosom, whose purple veins swelled full with every breath she drew. She lay in an attitude at once expressive of enforced resignation and ravening impatience, on the steps of the sarcophagus, gazing wildly around, starting at every crackle or flash of the flames, sometimes upbraiding the hags with the slow progress of the incantation, at others snatching up an open volume beside her, emblazoned with strange figures and characters, and reading in a distracted and hurried tone the directions which apparently it contained for the due performance of the spell. She had dashed away her silver diadem, and the masses of large sable rings in which her hair fell on her naked shoulders revealed and

heightened their perfect contour and whiteness. The expression of the countenance was at once celestial and fiendish; the distortions of contending passions, hope and despair, love and hatred, at times rendered it diabolic with all its great beauty, at others sunk it into what was perhaps its habitual cast—that of the pride and supernatural melancholy of a fallen seraph.

“He comes not, he comes not, and ye do but mock me with your mad mutterings and powerless herbs!” she exclaimed, as Cæsar gazed. “He is even now clasping his bride to his heart, and assuring her of his love, and upbraiding his long absence from her arms,—and gives not a thought—not a sigh—not one recollection to the all-abandoned Fiamma! And why should he? What charm have I to lure him back!—what spell is there in a beauty of which he was wearied ere he left me for accursed France!—a beauty which sorrow, and disgrace, and infamy have ravaged—ay, and time, and time, and time—for I am aged with grief!—nay, and how many years, think ye, I am older, friends, than this royal toy of Navarre?”

“Nay, daughter, when thou art as old as Notte it will be time enough to reckon years!” returned the dark-skinned sybil, lithening the stiff folds of a viper in a blue oil, which cast out a noisome perfume as she stirred it. “Fie, how the essence of wolf’s bones stinks in the nostrils!”

“She is but seventeen summers old, and I have been miserable three and twenty winters!” continued

the lady, in a tone of profound and utter desolation. "No more, no more, my friends! Leave me to die; what have I to do to live?"

"'Tis worth staying in this world were it merely to keep out of the other, daughter!" said the beldame of the skeleton carcass in a strange whistling voice, and with a grin which showed her white but deformed and unnaturally numerous teeth. "But for beauty—when thou art as lean and chapless as Morta—then mayest thou lament over thy vanished loveliness!"

"And wert thou of a fair presence once, Morta?" said Donna Fiamma, gazing at her with wild and yet absent earnestness.

"As my sister yonder—before the Inquisition (curse on every stone of it!) seized me and famished me, hanging by one hand, with the tip of my foot but a breath of air above the ground, to make me confess how I got my livelihood!" replied the hag. "It was before Cæsar's time, lady,—time out of mind,—and all who adjudged me are in hell, whither my curses continually follow them and stir the flames; and I am here. But what can repay me for being so withered and old before my time?"

And she looked with a malignant and envious leer at the beautiful Roman, who certainly scarcely noticed that she was speaking, or only so far as to understand that she had ceased.

"Thou lying book, and still more lying prophet!" she exclaimed, dashing the mysterious volume from her. "If the spell of love is over, what is there in

magic that can replace its power?—But doth the traitor think to trample on me thus?—O, Cæsar! thou hast made me a demon, but look that I prove not one that shall tear its maker into pieces!”

The sisters looked at each other, exchanged smiles such as serpents might give, and resumed their toils.

A silence of some moments followed, during which Fiamma leaned her burning cheek on her hand, and gazed with eager and devouring eyes on the glowing sarcophagus.

“An emperor’s dust is calcining there; what can the pride of the Son of Morning require more?” she said at length, in a melancholy musing tone.

“I told thee, daughter, that the heart should be taken from a living man, and not a dead deer!” said Morta, shaking her long skinny finger emphatically at the contents of the skull.

“Thou talkest now, indeed, mother, remorselessly as that death whose name thou bearest!” said Fiamma, with a convulsive shudder. “We have done all hitherto by the very letter and command of Dom Sabbat, and the book he gave me.”

“Dom Sabbat!—for my part I would so great a master as he reports himself would take the trouble and shame of his own failures!” said Notte, peevishly, and looking for approbation to her sister, in whom she recognised the superiority which her clearer intellect, sharpened and embittered by sufferings and wrongs more terrible, conferred.

“Yea, sister, we are not to blame if Borgia comes no nearer the Colonnas to-night than entering their

palace, in which a Colonna dare not be found for his head!" returned the malignant crone.

"A Colonna! a Colonna! Oh, that there were any saint in heaven to whom I dared shriek for mercy!" exclaimed the miserable lady, throwing herself with violence on the sphinxes' steps in a tearless agony of despair.

"Yield not thus hastily, daughter," said Notte, perhaps somewhat touched or alarmed by the excess of this silent anguish. "Albeit we fail with this spell of thy unknown Magus, we may do better with one of our own which is in our father's books—the wisest and the greatest since Zoroaster compelled the sun to stand still in heaven during a year of days and nights!—Be but patient—patient—patient!"

"We must have a warm human heart—not a cold deer's!" said Morta, contemptuously.

"Take your brass sickle, and tear out mine, for 'tis on fire in my breast!" said Fiamma ravingly, and pointing to an instrument which, in obedience to the traditions of the craft, the sisters used in gathering their herbs.

Again they exchanged their mysterious but dreadful smile, and continued their labours in silence, interrupted only by the disconsolate sighs and moanings of Fiamma.

At last, either wearied with these expressions of anguish, or that the grand moment of projection had arrived, Morta made a sign to her sister.

"We must now burn the heart in naphtha and frankincense!" she said. "Thou, daughter, put on the wreath of purple nightshade, and with bare feet,

and scattering flowers, walk continually around the sarcophagus, singing love-songs in a sweet and persuasive voice, until we bid you desist, when he will appear, or Dom Sabbat, adept of the Arabian school though he be, is a fool and a liar !”

The Roman lady arose listlessly and despairingly, and while the hags mumbled and assisted one another in preparing their drugs and fluids over the fiery sarcophagus, she slowly and hopelessly collected a heap of flowers in her arms, and bound her brows with the gloomy garland indicated by the weird woman. Not a movement of this drama was lost upon the unseen spectator, and although it is probable that the passion which the Roman beauty so wildly displayed for him excited rather his contempt than emotion, the tyrannical voluptuary could not be altogether insensible to its warmth. Still he resolved to mortify the sorceresses, and prove the futility of their spell by not appearing until they had exhausted it, and despaired of success.

The hags had now completed their preparation, and the heart appeared surrounded by a pure flame of naphtha ; and while they continued heaping it with frankincense, Fiamma commenced her perambulation, scattering flowers, and singing with a voice which, however wild and troubled, was of a passionate and melting harmony ; and with a frenzied fervour that gave her the aspect and inspired effulgence of beauty which would have befitted a Delphic sybil, she chaunted the following lines :—

THE INCANTATION.

By all the joys that we have shared,
By all the wrath that we have dared,
By all we are—and should not be—
By the despair and ecstasy !
The anguish and intolerable bliss
Of that moment—and of this !—
By the guilt and the rapture,
The triumph and the woe,
By the Heaven we have offended,
By the Hell that yawns below,
Come to the embrace which thou shouldst never know !

Spirits, that do his behest
Whom our love pleases best !
Bear on some wooing breeze
Thoughts which flood the soul like purple seas,
And burning memories of the times that were,
Like the all-melting warmth of sunset's golden air !
Remember him how first we met !
Remember him—alas ! who could forget,—
The terror and delight
Of that first pressure—slight
As music ruffling the still waves,
When our lips trembled together,
Like two rosebuds in summer weather,
Fanned by warm wafts,—or waters that join their mutual
laves !
Recall to him that moment which we dare not name,
When they met deliriously, in mingling flame,
And all was lost but the delight without measure,
Which perished with its own excess of pleasure !

But if love may not move,
Nor all the untravelled tracks of joy we yet might prove,
Yet—by the deep damnation we must share,
By our eternal despair,
By the doom which circles us in allwhere,
Which is only hell when parted,
Albeit together broken-hearted !—
By the hatred in the eyes of men
Who smile,—but most do loathe us then,—
Come, come, come to mine arms,
By these, or by whatever are of more prevailing charms !

As she sung, the voluptuous and affecting recollections kindled by her words, the melody of her voice, her beauty, her despair, the intoxicating vapours of the drugs, roused Cæsar's passions into flame. In the delirium and enthusiasm of returning love,—if love we may dare to call it,—Cæsar forgot all his determinations and desire to disappoint the beldame sisters. He entered the winding hollow of the pillar, and turning round and round with giddy rapidity, descended, and arriving at the exit at the very instant when the flames of the naphtha expired, the song ceased, and Fiamma had halted like a figure suddenly transformed into stone,—he leaped into the chamber. One wild shriek, and she had rushed into his arms, while the hags, after a momentary pause of surprise, clapped their withered hands in congratulation. Showers of tears, amidst wild laughter, sobs, sighs, kisses delirious with passion and joy, a million broken exclamations of delight and despair, love and reproach, embraces which in their frantic ardour overstepped or despised all the limits of female

reserve,—betrayed the convulsive reaction in the soul of the despairing sorceress.

“And didst thou deem any other spell necessary to lure me back to thee, than the memory of thy beauty and our past happiness?” said Cæsar, when this sunny hail-shower had begun to slacken, and kissing away the tears which continued to flow over the now crimsoning cheeks.

“Nay, Cæsar, nay!—I but desired to hear thee say thou hast not utterly abandoned me, love!—to know that I am not altogether alone in the universe in the presence of that God whom I have betrayed!” exclaimed the hapless lady of Santangelo. “Tell me but—but—that thou dost not despise and loathe me as I do myself! Remember that although I have lost all—I have lost all for thee! Remember that I was the bride of Christ—the daughter of Colonna, innocent, happy, loved,—remember what I was once and am now,—a wretch under the malediction of Heaven and of earth,—of the Celestial Spouse whom I have abandoned,—of the illustrious name I have darkened,—remember all the oaths thou hast broken,—remember that—oh, what have I not suffered and lost for thee—and can I, can I, Cæsar, forgive thee ever?—do aught but hate and curse thee, and wear out my soul in imprecations on thy head!”

“Curse on, then, loveliest; for my part I will kiss!” said Cæsar, renewing his caresses. “But dost thou too reproach me with my miseries, for I trow thy woman’s frenzy is running now on this ill-starred and unwilling marriage of mine with the silly French girl of Navarre?”

“Yes, traitor—yes, fathomless betrayer!” exclaimed Donna Fiamma, with sudden fury, and tearing herself from his embrace. “And darest thou with that unblushing front—thus carelessly—speak of that consummation of all perfidy—that perjury unmatched—which alone shall damn thee below the blackest fiends of hell—the betrayers of a thousand generations of men? Villain, villain, villain!—is this thy pledge sworn by oaths which made the stars turn pale,—that thou would make me thy wife,—thy queen—the Empress of Italy?”

Notte smiled, and began mumbling in her teeth, but Morta breathlessly signed to her not to interrupt a conversation so much to her malign and misanthropic taste.

“I remember the occasion well,” said Cæsar, in a cajoling and yet ironical tone. “Thou mindest me well, my bright Fiamma! We were in the vineyard of the gloomy Carmelites, where they had imprisoned thee; I was the cardinal Valentino then, thou wert the nun Maddelena; I was leading thee to my ladder of ropes on the walls where good old Aliberto trained his choicest figs for my lady abbess’s own dish; and thou wert as reluctant as an it were leaving paradise, weeping and turning thy lustrous neck towards the stony walls, what could I but promise? But was it for an intellect like thine, which unites the greatest qualities of man’s even with the most passionate and wayward of woman’s, to believe me, or to deem that Heaven would ratify an oath by which we swore to make us perjurers to itself?”

“But hell, at least, confirmed it, Cæsar!—thou art

absolved from thy priestly shackles,—thou art on thy way, if thy soul quail not, to that empire which I was to have shared,—which a barbarian girl—sprung from the deadliest enemies of Italy—the deepest-dyed in her blood—shall mount with thee, it seems!” returned Fiamma, with a slight pause at the conclusion, not unnoted by the subtle Borgia.

“Yea, Fiamma, yea, my soul’s soul!—I have mounted, and ever by thy means, until my foot is now on the first round of empire!” he said, fixing his eyes with a passionate and mournful expression on the lady. “And wouldst thou dash me down again,—dispel the vision just as its brightness is hardening into a reality as brilliant as if raised in solid diamond? And wherefore?—a woman’s phantasy!—an unreasoning jealousy fit only to be entertained by one of thy sex’s common sort, above whom thy glorious and heroic spirit set thee ever as a star over the sparkles of a camp watch-fire,—who, indeed, might smile where thou wilt weep to hear me say that, whoever properties this poor casket of my soul, the gem is thine,—thine only,—and, despite of all appearances to the contrary, never, for an instant, has it wavered in its faith to thee!”

“Art thou not this princess’s husband?—Or what liars are those who sent us the news of thy gorgeous nuptials in Orleans?” returned Fiamma, wildly. “Traitor, traitor!—But I will not pass away without my vengeance—and would that then I might sink into the nothingness from which I have only been evoked to suffer!”

“What canst thou do, Fiamma?” said Cæsar,

smilingly. "If I had feared thy vengeance on thy French rival,—if I had not known that seeing her *thou* wouldst know that my soul, which has been twined in fire with thine, could not mingle with that watery phantom's of vapour,—if I had loved her,—deem you I had trusted her in this city, without commands to keep thee in reality a prisoner, as thou art in name?"

"And art thou assured that thy commands could have been obeyed!—Have I not brought thee hither by a spell, thou cruel, thou unmerciful betrayer!" said Fiamma, with eyes that sparkled at once with tears and fury. "And could not one of equal power belike have rescued me from thy castle and thy myrmidons' clutch?"

"Now, by holy Peter! I swear I do believe thou hast a spell—and one irresistible!" returned Cæsar, seizing the indignant beauty, and clutching her, despite her struggles and wrath, in a fierce embrace. "But have I not one over thee?—Dost thou not love me, my Fiamma?—Hast thou not lost heaven itself for me?—Art thou not the talisman of my power and of my glory, for without thy love to reward, thy courage to prompt, thy zeal to second, were I not still a whining priest cursing the altars at which he kneels? Moreover, love, thou art so wholly mine that thou canst in no way harm me without harming thyself a thousand-fold!"

"And deemest thou, Cæsar, that I fear aught which thy power, or thy sire's, or all mankind's, can do against me?" said the lady, with a smile of supernatural despair. "What if I had yielded to

the impulse that urged me, as if with an angel's fiery sword, to rush out of my prison, and proclaim thy crimes in the presence of the whole Christian world, assembled before St. Peter's tomb?—They would have believed me there!”

“What would they have believed?—’Tis indeed not altogether incredible in this land of Boccaccio, that a priest might err, or a youthful nun discover that the blood in her veins flowed something warmer than melting ice,” said Cæsar, tranquilly. “But thou knowest, shouldst thou adventure to revive that ancient charge against me, there is thine own confession on record before the tribunal of the Holy Office, confirmed by the pagan sultan, whose leman thou didst avow thyself, before so many witnesses!”

“To shield thee from the just infamy of thy crime—to baffle the vengeance of my noble uncles—the brothers of my dead father!” replied Fiamma, vehemently. “Oh, Prospero and Fabrizio!—what heavier vengeance need you imprecate on my guilty head! Oh, aged Colonna, my grandsire, thy curse is now exhausted! Hopeless days and sleepless nights!—remorse, and terror, and despair, and desolation for ever around me! Oh, needed it this, thy last irrevocable treason, betrayer! to fill to overflowing the cup of my bitterness?”

“Wherefore, then, didst thou not tarry with thy heathen saviour, as thou wert wont to call the vile worshipper of Mahound, who gave thee shelter in that troublous hour?” said Cæsar, darkening into livid paleness. “I trow, if all the truth were known, I had but little cause to laud myself on his gene-

rosity in taking upon him a blame which nothing harmed him, and welcoming to his seraglio beauty like thine, while the storm rattled over me alone, and no man was deceived, save the fool, perchance, who trusted his treasure to the keeping of a robber ! ”

“ Thou sayest not this, Cæsar, as meaning it,—thou dost not,—thou darest not ! ” said Fiamma, with rekindling fury. “ And yet the noble Turk died—as those whom thou hatest are wont to die !—Oh, if he perished by thy treachery, and not by thy father’s cruelty and avarice sold to the imperial murderer, his brother,—why then, Cæsar, why then !—But ’tis impossible !—Oh, God ! let this at least be impossible !—And yet thou hadst a brother, too, once !—Cæsar ! I but desired thy presence to tell thee how I hated, loathed, despised thee !—to bid thee farewell for ever ! ”

“ Shall we remove the image, daughter, or close it up in the marble, as Dom Sabbat bade us, to preserve thy lover ever loving, and bring him continually back to thine arms like a bird to its nest ? ” said Morta, with a hideous grin of scorn and malice, her serpent eyes overflowing with fiendish delight and cunning.

“ Pardon me, gorgon mothers, for not previously baring my head to your furyships !—But what sayest thou, love !—my own Fiamma !—what shall the grisly mothers do ? ” said Cæsar, gazing with eyes fraught with fire on his beautiful victim.

Shame and passion, pride and disdain struggled

for some instants in her haughty bosom, and alternately whitened and crimsoned her gorgeous complexion, like the rose and snowy lights of an Alpine sunset. But it was not hard to predict which emotion would triumph in the tempestuous spirit of the fond Italian, and sinking in an agony of shame and love in the betrayer's arms, the weird sisters seemed to need no further instructions. While Cæsar poured forth a torrent of passionate assurances and loving upbraidings of her doubts, they proceeded, by the operation of some unseen mechanical agency, muttering divers recondite spells, to cover the sarcophagus with a lid which seemed to belong to it. When this was completed, Notte melted some lead in an earthen pot of naphtha, and they proceeded to solder it up, with many additional rites and ceremonies.

“Thou triumphest, Cæsar, thou triumphest!—But, man, thou art mistaken in me!—I desire henceforth to be only thy friend,—thy counsellor if thou wilt,—but lover never more!” she said, starting up with a new outbreak of womanly wrath and shame. “Leave me now, my heart is sufficiently comforted. I have seen thee—I know thou dost not hate me!—’Tis enough: return to thy bride—to thy home—leave me to my despair—to my lonely anguish!—I will watch thee to thy palace from my towers,—and as the last torch vanishes in its gates, I shall know that although thy bride stand there to meet thee, thou art remembering that in those halls of my fathers, thou didst first behold me, an innocent child at my

grandsire's feet—wreathing a garland of flowers in my careless joy to deck the gray hairs which I was to bring with sorrow and disgrace to the tomb!”

Even Cæsar Borgia was touched with this melancholy recollection.

“Nay, loveliest!—my first and only love!—even by the memory of that delicious past! I will not leave thee till thou hast sworn to love me as faithfully and wholly as then!” he said, vehemently. “And hear me, when in return I swear to thee, by all my hopes of sovereignty and vengeance!—the moment the necessity of keeping the favour of the detested French is over, I will send them their foolish gewgaw back, and keep to thee far, far more than ever I have sworn, and thou, indeed, shalt be my wife, my queen, my empress, and share with me the diadem of Italy!”

Weeping, but listening not unsoothedly to the flattering sounds, Fiamma murmured some scarcely articulate words to the busy hags, to which, however, they nodded assent. With an irresolute glance at Cæsar, she yet suffered him to follow her in the ascent of the pillar, but so rapidly she went, that not being accustomed to its giddy gyrations, he was left considerably in the rear. On reaching the summit, he was surprised to find Migueloto there with a torch,—but Fiamma had vanished.

“Where is Donna Fiamma?—Hast thou not seen her pass, Migueloto?” he exclaimed.

“My lord, no!” returned the captain, much startled. “Yet I have been awaiting your excellency here a tedious hour.”

“ But this is strange ! ” said Cæsar, with a momentary feeling of superstitious awe. “ It would almost seem that she hath discovered the secret of walking invisible !—And, in truth, there must needs be some magic in her spell, for scarcely in the maddest days of my love for her, did her coyish pranks so irk me as now ! I will not leave the castle till I have found her.”

“ ’Tis looking for a seed in a pomegranate, my lord, if she is bent to the contrary,” said Don Migueloto. “ And I must needs remind your grace, that the great company which awaits to welcome you to your new palace, have already surpassed all patience in their courteous attendance.”

“ State affairs — state affairs — thou knowest, captain, have detained us ! Lend me thy torch, this capricious girl shall not thus sport with the flames she sets to the hearts of others ! ” returned the chief, impatiently ; and snatching the torch, he began his explorations with an eagerness and perseverance which was long before it yielded to Migueloto’s convictions of their uselessness. It was easily ascertained that she could not have retired to her own apartments, for none of the sentinels, whom she must have passed, had seen the least signs of such an apparition.

“ She hath indeed discovered a spell which, by our Lady ! had she known earlier, might have kept me enslaved much longer than as it befel ! ” said the duke, at last, with mingled vexation and emotion. “ But look to it, captain, that I find her in sight at my next visit,—or I shall deem thou art in the trick

too ! And bid her summon her Dom Sabbat,—or rather mine,—for he must needs be of some wonderful skill, in a science in which I am curious—no more ! So stare not with thy stony eyes—but learn to obey without thinking too much on what thou hast but to put in act.”

And with this admonition, Cæsar unwillingly prepared to quit the fortress.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ *Va col pensier cercando in mille modi
Non creder quel ch'al suo dispetto crede.*”

ARIOSTO.

And with a thousand crafty turns of thought,
He strives not to believe what still he must.

MEANWHILE the canon hastened to the Orsini palace, sorrowfully revolving the obstinacy of his young lord, but not altogether discontent to be out of the way of the perils in which his strange purposes were likely to involve him. After the destruction of the Colonna family, the Orsini had undoubtedly become the chief of the Roman nobility, a pre-eminence for which they had struggled for ages with that house. And now, enriched with a large portion of the plunder of the Colonnas, and by their numerous alliances and possessions, equalling many of the inferior princes of Italy, the wonder that they should resist the power of the Borgias, changes into one, that the Borgias could make head against theirs.

But little was wanting to make the grandeur of the Orsini sovereign. The immense circuit of their palace, and the contiguous district, were crowded

with their armed adherents. Numerous bands of foreign mercenaries surrounded them, and the followers of several of the great barons by whose aid they had so successfully resisted the attempts of Cæsar, now swelled their usual force to that of an army. Among these, the canon found the burly Vitellozzo, and a company more congenial to his refined and intellectual tastes in the persons and retinues of Pier de' Medici, and Guidobaldo, duke of Urbino, one of the most distinguished guests, whose little court was then famous as the Athens of Italy, and who possessed a principality, the strength and remoteness of which had enabled its possessors for ages to refuse all but a nominal submission to the Holy See. The duke was rendered yet more obnoxious to Alexander personally, as the nephew of his most bitter and active enemy, the cardinal Julian della Rovere, afterwards pontiff under the name of Julius II.

The canon was received by the Orsini with the cordiality due to one of the deliverers of their heir, and deep regret was expressed by all at the determination of the Knight of St. John, although with a somewhat enforced warmth by Paolo himself. The chief branches of this great family now consisted of the Duke of Gravina, his brother, the Archbishop of Florence, and two sons, beside Paolo, one of whom was a cardinal, the other a young and delicate boy. The duke and his brother might be taken as the last representatives of an order of things which was rapidly passing away. The former, a man well stricken in years, but still animated by fierce passions, ignorant and superstitious, despotic, proud, and

vengeful, but lavishly generous to his followers and dependents, lofty and implacable to his enemies, ferociously fervid in favour of his friends, heedless of the right or wrong in their cause, embodied many of the characteristics, good and evil, of the great feudal noble of the fifteenth century. The archbishop was a prelate much more skilled in the lance than in the breviary, and being dispossessed of the revenues of his bishopric with his kinsfolk, the Medici, spent the greater part of his life in active and persevering labours to restore them in Florence; and being endowed with a very sanguine, restless, and courageous disposition, was not one of the least formidable of the enemies of the republic.

The sons of the Duke of Gravina, on the other hand, represented the passing and the approaching era. The Lord Paolo, fraught with the same violent passions, but governing them by a finer reason, and modified in manners by the refined tastes which began to prevail; his brother, the cardinal, learned, polished, ambitious, and intriguing, represented the new generation, while the young Fabio, studious, melancholy, and gentle, somewhat shadowed forth that weaker but more elegant and calm age which was to succeed. Traces of the approaching changes appeared even in the military household of the Duke of Gravina; artists and scholars of various pretensions mingled with the brawling soldiery who crowded it; and discussions of philosophy and Arcadian contentions in verse made themselves heard amidst the din of arms. Brutal mercenaries, refined poets, gorgeous painters, plotting exiles, intriguing

ecclesiastics, composed groups in which might be discerned a fair epitome of the times.

The opinions which Bembo entertained on the subject of the projected alliance between his prince and the daughter of the Borgias, which had been much deepened by the sight of her surpassing beauty, were not likely to meet with any check in the society with which he now mingled. The Orsini and their guests were alike absorbed in the hopes and fears which the alliance prompted. Ambition in the Duke of Gravina, and desire to secure his house from the destruction menaced by the Borgias, made the thought ever uppermost in his mind. The confederate barons regarded it as the only durable cement of the new peace and of their own power; and the alliance was especially dear on that account to the Duke of Urbino, whose love of learned leisure and of the arts, personal infirmities, and great possessions, rendered him the most unwilling to engage in broils, and the most likely to be assailed by them.

The canon was somewhat surprised at Sir Reginald's demeanour on learning the resolution of his illustrious brother-in-arms. It seemed that he admired his unshaken determination against the projected alliance; but in speaking of it, he so marvelled at Alfonso's ability to refuse such happiness, and launched into praises so passionate of Lucrezia's beauty, that Bembo laughingly bade him remember that love in Italy was not of the slow growth of the north. The knight's martial visage suffused like that of a young maiden, and Bembo thought more of his own words than at first he had. But the

light shade of suspicion vanished, when he observed the warmth of the friendship which the frank and undissembling northman had contracted with Paolo Orsino.

Two or three days intervened before the opening of the jubilee, and meanwhile the Hospitaller began to imagine that in coming to Rome for evidence against Lucrezia, he was likely to find his labour in vain. Vague rumours, indeed, he encountered similar to those which had already prejudiced him so strongly against her; but very strangely all this darkness which surrounded Lucrezia seemed only to give a contrast which heightened the splendour of her brilliant qualities, and the interest which her beauty and talents universally created. The Roman populace, with a species of that enthusiasm for all that is illustrious, which they have preserved among the few relics of their glory, idolized her for the mere perfection of her person; and, moreover, believed that to her they owed the paternal mildness of the rule, with which Alexander had replaced the ruthless tyranny of the barons. It seemed impossible to discover any tangible proof, or even clue to one; all that was certainly known was in Lucrezia's favour.

The Knight of St. John did not often see Sir Reginald during this interval, partly at his own desire, and partly because the latter was deeply engaged in warlike exercises with the Lord Paolo, who earnestly desired to shine before his mistress in a tournament, which was to be given among the other rejoicings of the festival. The knights of England and of France surpassed those of all other countries in the science of these military

pastimes, and Le Beaufort, as might be expected in one of such strength and agility, trained to arms, and delighting in little else from his childhood, was of amazing dexterity in all exercise of the body. Alfonso had also been his pupil, and owed much of his skill to the young tramontane's instructions. But Messer Bembo presented himself as frequently as the prince would permit, and always with some new insinuations in favour of Lucrezia. Among the rest he had discovered that she was a poetess, and in the little poems which Pier de' Medici and others of the guests in the Orsini palace ascribed to her, there breathed a strange mixture of voluptuousness and melancholy, tenderness and gaiety, that but for the general shadow which was indefinitely visible over all, the Hospitaller would have thought it impossible that so dark a spirit could give utterance to phantoms so radiantly coloured, and dancing in pleasurable light.

Apprehending that among the multitude of strangers whom he might expect to encounter, some one would recognise him, Alfonso rigidly adhered to his monkish costume, the hood of which enabled him to conceal his countenance without exciting attention. The austerity of his general conduct authorized this strictness in observing the rules of his order, which, in that age of dissolution and license might else have challenged suspicion. And thus he spent his time, restlessly wandering about the great city and its ruins, striving in vain, although a scholar, and fraught with the grand historical recollections which haunt all its circuit, to take an interest in what he beheld, and rather distracted than amused with the Babel-like

confusion of nations, languages, and costumes, which surrounded him.

The days immediately preceding the opening of the jubilee were devoted by the pilgrims to solemn and penitential devotion, confession, and the fulfilment of various vows. The stairs of St. Peter were continually crowded with devotees, who spent whole days in ascending them on their knees, uttering a certain number of prayers on each step, persons of the highest rank, and especially women, being of the number. But it raised strange thoughts on the depravity of the times, to witness how continually the confessional of the grand Penitentiary was entered by masked personages, though professedly instituted for the audience of crimes of a magnitude beyond all the extensive powers of absolution confided to the clergy in general. On this subject Alfonso took a new and extraordinary interest when he heard that the office was exercised by the Dominican confessor of Donna Lucrezia. He conceived a project which was in keeping with the characteristics of the Italian mind, but which was probably not uninfluenced by the superstitious feeling to which the associations of his whole life had subjected even the powerful intellect of the Prince of Ferrara.

The thought occurred to him that he would seek the presence of the Penitentiary, and confess the horrors which filled his mind under pretence of learning whether such suspicions against the pontiff, although involuntary, were an offence against the church. The look or even gestures of the confessor of Lucrezia might throw more light than any words

he was likely to reply. Accordingly, enveloped in his mantle and hood, the Knight of St. John went to St. Peter's, in which the Penitentiary held his dark sessions. It was the eve of the jubilee, and at the hour of vespers. The area of the basilica was filled with a vast and silent crowd, absorbed in their devotions, and the only light was bestowed by the evening sun duskily illuminating the emblazoned windows, or the glimmer of distant shrines hung with black, and attended each by its group of ministering priests.

The Penitentiary's station was in the subterraneous chapel, in which is the tomb of St. Peter—the very loadstone of devotion throughout the Christian world. Standing among a number of penitents in a dark vault before the shrine, the scene within was only occasionally visible to Alfonso, when the bronze gate opened for the exit or entrance of some of those heavily laden sinners. The tomb was stripped of its costly ornaments, and lighted only by the torches of some monks, each of a different nation, whose office it was to interpret to the Penitentiary whenever occasion arose. These torches gave the dusk and mournful light suiting the place of sepulchre of martyred saints. On the tomb itself stood an urn of black marble, beneath which was an alabaster tablet, on which were engraven the bull declaring the jubilee, and the conditions of penance and prayer to enable the faithful to obtain its benefits. The devotion and infinite variety of the pilgrims was evinced by the great heap of coins of the mintage of almost all the European nations, and of all metals, from gold to

lead, which were piled before the shrine. Immediately below this treasury, in a coarse wooden chair, sat the Penitentiary—his hands clasped rigidly together, and his usually stern and pale visage overspread with a darker haze of its habitual gloom.

While Alfonso was anxiously awaiting his turn to be admitted to the presence of the Penitentiary, the gates of the confessional suddenly opened, and a female form glided out. She was closely veiled, and in his absorption of mind, Alfonso might scarcely have noticed her, but for the singular intensity of the gaze with which the Dominican followed her retreating figure. Glancing at the lady, a vague suspicion crossed Alfonso's mind that she was not altogether unknown to him. It seemed, too, that the lady paused, as if involuntarily, and with a gesture of surprise, but almost simultaneously she quickened her step, and hastened out.

To verify this doubt, however, became a matter of such eager curiosity to the Knight of St. John, that he abandoned his first project, and followed the fair confessionalist in her hurried exit. Keeping at some distance in the rear to prevent suspicion, he watched the lady down the aisles into a side chapel, and concluding that she had entered to perform some devotional exercise, he determined to await her return at the portal. A considerable time elapsed when, growing impatient, he entered the chapel. He found it hung with black, with an altar in the centre dimly illuminated, near which was the tomb of a former pontiff of the Borgian name, Calixtus III. Some priests were engaged in chaunting a funeral mass at

the altar; and the veiled lady was kneeling before it, apparently absorbed in devotion, or in some stronger feeling, for Alfonso heard her sob when she attempted to articulate in the responses to the solemn and pathetic litany which the Catholic church consecrates to the dead. But Alfonso's observation was immediately checked. A vergers came forward upon those soundless shoes which all vergers seem to have, and mildly informed him that the lady, Donna Lucrezia, had commanded that no one should be admitted during the performance of the mass for the repose of the soul of her murdered brother, the Duke of Gandia.

"Ay, she is afraid that men will note the strange excess of her grief—she whose offences are, even in her own opinion, of a dye to call for the cleansing hand of the Penitentiary himself!" mused Alfonso bitterly, as he retired; and persuading himself that he was much pleased with this shadow of confirmation, he returned with a somewhat laggard step to his projected interview with the Dominican. But as he arrived in the church, which was now nearly in darkness, he heard a distant chaunt, and saw a procession approaching down the centre aisle; and by the torches which they carried he distinguished a number of Dominicans, with the banner of the Inquisition borne among them, a red cross in a black field, bearing the motto—

"In hoc signo vinces."

Among them, and seemingly as the principal personage, came Fra Bruno. The gloom and austere melancholy of his countenance was strongly contrasted

by the round and jovial features of the monk, who, according to the custom of religious orders, was the Dominican's special companion. If a hero is seldom one to his valet-de-chambre, familiarity seemed in no wise to have diminished the reverence of the theologian's attendant, who followed him with the respectful admiration and awe due to a superior being.

To the increased disappointment of the Knight of St. John, the procession was joined as it advanced by a number of noblemen and dignitaries civil and religious, among whom were the three conservatori, as the principal magistrates of Rome, under the Senator, were styled. A guard of pikemen belonging to these magistrates, waited at the entrance of the basilica, who surrounded the procession when it arrived, and escorted it through the crowd in the square below towards the bridge of Santangelo, attended by a great multitude. The observations of the bystanders soon explained the meaning of this scene to the Hospitaller.

"I'll to the Ghetto, and hear him preach to the infidel dogs of Jews!" exclaimed one.

"They say he will preach in Hebrew, for he has the gift of the tongues like the Apostles!" said another.

"I marvel the holy father thinks it worth his while to trouble about the souls of Jews!" said an old beggar.

"He is sufficient to convert the fiends in hell!—O, my brethren, what an honour it is that our order should have produced such a saint on earth!" said a Dominican among the crowd.

“In troth, it is said ye lead him the life of one!” said the deformed tailor, who happened to be at hand. “Yet some report it is not by the good will of his brethren that he was not long ago translated above!”

The laugh at this sarcastic allusion to the jealousies by no means unusual among those who ought least to entertain them, had scarcely subsided, ere a rough voice yelled out—“What avails preaching to the murderers of our Lord? For my part, I would set the whole Jewry in a blaze, and burn them root and branch in it!”

“It is always usual to preach to them on the great vigils of the church, and what is greater than the Jubilee?—besides, they pay notable fines for exemptions,” said an officer of the Datary’s chamber.

“I fear ’tis a composition with Antichrist!” returned a personage who from his garb might be a familiar of the Inquisition.

He who had proposed the root and branch measure turned with eager approval to the functionary, but on observing his costume, immediately dived into the crowd like a fish into the water. The Hospitaller had scarcely time to take a glance at this violent specimen of Christian zeal; but in that brief view he was much struck with his appearance. He was a man past the middle age, with the sallow complexion of a peasant of the Marshes, to which his costume answered. His broad hat, garnished with many-coloured ribands, was drawn over his visage, but not sufficiently to conceal the ghastly scars with which it was disfigured. His lurking suspicious eye, and

the peculiar manner with which, from habit, he carried his short cloak drawn over his breast, as if to conceal the naked stiletto, convinced the knight that, whatever he might assume to be, he was one of those blackest of the scourges of Italy which the license of the times had rendered fearfully numerous—the banditti and bravoës.

Scarcely bestowing more than a thought on so usual an evidence of social disorder, the Hospitaller passed on without noticing that he himself had attracted at least equal attention from the worthy described. Being now aware of the direction in which he was certain to find the Dominican, Alfonso determined not to follow his train through the quarter which led to the Ghetto, to which indeed the multitude offered serious obstacles, only allowing room for the monk's retinue in reverence to him, and by painfully compressing one another; but to hire a boat which would probably convey him to the scene of action as speedily as those who went by land through so many obstructions, though the river wound considerably. He took his way down a narrow lane which descended to the Tiber in a precipitous slope, and gave the usual whistle. Only one little boat appeared, whose owner seemed to be asleep in despair of custom, for it was not until the whistle was repeated more shrilly that he set his oars in motion, and came slowly over the water.

It was one of those barques common on the Tiber, used in transporting fruit and vegetables and other light merchandize. It was built on a pattern probably in use in the days of the first Tarquin. A slender

bowsprit of some supple wood, nearly double the length of the boat, lay across a little mast, with its canvass ready to be spread for shelter against the sun, or to catch any favouring breeze. The prow was high and curved, and ornamented with rude carvings, the rudder broad, and the oars of classical squatness and breadth. The old man himself who rowed it seemed dried and hardened by exposure and toil into a kind of wood, but that the expression of discontent and gloom in his visage belonged but too much to flesh.

The knight stepped into this barque without exchanging a word with his equally laconic Charon, until having taken his place at the rudder, he said "To the Ghetto!" The boatman immediately splashed in his oars, and they were fairly out in the stream ere the knight observed that there was a third passenger—and no other than the assumed peasant of the Marshes.

"What dost thou here, fellow?—The boat is mine for the nonce," said the Hospitaller, not without a start of unpleasant surprise.

The peasant replied in a rude and broken dialect, that he besought his reverend lordship's pardon, but as a Christian anxious to hear the confutation of the Jews out of their own books, he implored to be allowed to accompany him.

The knight mused for an instant; but considering the determined manner of the ruffian, which gave the humility of his phrase a tinge of mockery, the doubtful nature of his own suspicions, and of the boatman's appearance, he desisted from his first intention, which was to throw his follower overboard.

“But thou shalt not have thy passage for thanks,” he said, hitting upon an ingenious plan to obviate any sudden danger from the lurking right hand. “Take a pair of oars, and help the old man on, or I tell thee plainly, good brother pilgrim, one of us two must leave the wood for the water.”

A slight shuffling of the hand in the cloak seemed to indicate that the Hospitaller’s suspicions were not without foundation. At all events, the movement of sheathing a weapon would have produced a similar sound. But the man obeyed without apparent hesitation, and thus reinforced, the boat shot rapidly down the stream.

The knight’s observation never in reality wandered from the persons of his rowers, but he affected to survey the shores on each side with the curiosity of a stranger. On one was the thronged and thickly built piles of the ancient city, on the other the Janiculan Hill with its solitary palaces and immense gardens. The moon shining in a sky of silvery blue, speckled with little purple clouds, revealed the distant magnificence of the Vatican, and suffered the gaze to expand even to the remote swell of the Apennines.

By degrees the shores widened into the elbow-like bend of the Tiber below the Capitoline, and the Island of St. Bartholomew appeared. Beyond that, the river takes another deep curve, bathing the base of the mountain of ruins—the Aventine. Even from that distance, colossal relics of ancient grandeur—shattered walls—naked porticoes—wildernesses of broken arches and solitary columns—could be discerned amidst the woods and wild vegetation, which had arisen as if to

re-assert their ancient possession of the deserted site. The impressed oarsman did little to excite farther suspicion, and both he and the old boatman plied their task manfully—until suddenly, as if by consent, they dropped their oars, and both began to mutter a *Pater Noster*. In spite of this pious exordium, the knight's suspicions would have vented themselves in some positive form, if he had not observed that the boatmen and the peasant both stopped short, and looked at each other with surprise.

“Hast thou a vow to St. Bartlemy too, brother?” said the boatman, speaking nearly for the first time since he had received his passengers on board.

“Nay, brother, but hereabouts they say is the great mouth of the city sinks, down which so many dead Christians hourly float, that I thought it a good deed to pray for the soul of any that may now be coming,” replied the disguised bravo, as he more than ever seemed to Don Alfonso.

“And hereabouts began my ill luck, for ever since I saw the Duke of Gandia's body (poor gentleman!) thrown into the river yonder, I have been shunned like the pestilence, by all but strangers whom St. Bartlemy occasionally sends to keep me from starvation,” said the boatman, dismally. “No Roman will be seen in my boat, lest the murderers should believe that I am giving inklings as to their persons and qualities, when heaven knows, if I can guess at either!”

“Art thou sure of that, old man?—His holiness would not tell the gold with which he would repay such intelligence as might guide his vengeance?” re-

turned the peasant of the Marshes, in a pure Roman dialect, and he drew himself with a sudden slide towards the old man, gazing at him eagerly, and putting his hand again in his cloak. But ere any effect could follow this gesture, the Knight of St. John sprang forward, and with a sudden exertion of his great strength, fairly heaved the peasant overboard !

“ My lord ! would you murder the man ? ” exclaimed the boatman, staring aghast.

“ If he be a peasant of the Marshes, they are all as good for water as land,—if not, he is some assassin, who is as well below, to keep company perchance with some of his sending there ! ” replied the Hospitaller. “ What is this he hath left behind him ?—Is this stiletto thine, old man ? ”

“ Oh, blessed Bartlemy, no ! ” exclaimed the boatman, raising the weapon as cautiously as if he were picking up a serpent. “ But, as I think, I have seen just such a one hanging at the belt of John of the Catacombs, ere he and his bravoës were banished by the good Cardinal of Sienna ! ”

“ Would, then, I had an arquebuss or bow, for yonder is his head dotting up in the water—now under again, like a water duck’s—as if he feared a bolt ! ” said the knight. “ He is making for the reeds in the island ; but so much the better do I think of thee for his mislike, that I will myself tug at the oar—so have with you ! ”

“ Ah, my lord, I was not once so gloomy a man as to make people misdoubt me, but as full of my songs and cheer as another,” returned the boatman.

“ But every thing has gone wrong with me since that night—that night!—and all for being so tired, that I forgot to say my devotion to the Saint of the Ship!”

By the latter name, the unlucky boatman designated the island of the Tiber, which, in those days, still preserved a resemblance to the form in which the fantastic magnificence of the republic had thrown it.

“ But how chanced it?—Tell me the story, for it hath been variously bruited in the northern countries of Italy, whence thy Roman ear has long since advised thee I come?” said the knight, with an anxiety which he carefully suppressed in his tones.

“ Why, you must know, signor, it was some such night as this, only it was on a Wednesday, but I speak now of the weather,” said the old man, his suppressed sorrows suddenly bursting into garrulity. “ I had unloaded my wood on the shore yonder, near the Jewish quarter, and was resting myself in the serene of the night, in my boat, as well as I could, for the watch I was bound to keep, that nobody else should load himself with what I had unloaded; and, by the whitening of the stars, it might have been about midnight, when I saw—(would to all the saints I had been asleep, as many a time that night a good angel strove to lull me, with the calmest sounds that ever I heard of wind and water!) when I saw, coming out of the lane, to the left of the church of San Girolamo (*ora pro me!*) two men on the open square—on foot—who, by their skulking manner, and going backward and forward, showed that they

were only there to find out if there was anybody else."

"Have you no recollection of their persons?" interrupted the knight, eagerly.

"By our Lady!—but one was very like yon rogue, whom I hope your lordship has sunk!" said the old man, pleased with the interest his tale excited. "The other, by his voice and stiff gait, might be a Spaniard,—but they both wore black masks. Having explored in every direction, and seeing not a living soul, (for your lordship may believe, I dared scarcely move under the sail with which I had covered me against the dew,) they returned up the same lane. Shortly after, two others came out, who used a like diligence, and finding nothing new, gave a signal, which seemed to summon their companions; for out of the lane came, first, a man upon a dapple grey horse, who carried on the crupper the body of a dead man, the head and arms hanging on one side, and the feet on the other; and the two men who had come in the first place to see how the land lay, propped it on each side, lest it should hustle off."

"These three came forward to the river (the other two remaining to guard the street); and just above the arches of the sewers, he who was on horseback turned the crupper to the water, and the two who were on each side of him seized the dead carcass, one by the arms, the other by the legs, and after swinging it backward and forward once or twice, for the better purchase, they tossed it headlong into the water. Then he who was on horseback inquired of them, whether 'it was thrown?' without turning his

head, as if to shun the horror of the sight ; but when they replied, ‘ signor, yes ;’ he whirled the horse round, and turned his face to the river.”

“And his face !—Dost thou not remember it ?—Some dim view thou must needs have caught of it ?” said the knight, so breathlessly agitated that the old man paused and seemed affrighted.

“I have already told your excellence, and so may Saint Bartlemy send me bread or not, I dared not look at it, lest the horseman’s eye, which blazed like a coal, should meet mine—for there is a strange something in eyes, signor, that men always feel when they are looked at ! But seeing the dead man’s mantle float on the waters, he asked, what black thing that was, swimming ? Whereupon one answered—one answered—”

“And what ?” exclaimed the impatient Hospitaller.

“Heaven forgive me if it comes not often into my memory, that he said ‘*Eminence*,—the mantle !’—But, no, it must have been Excellence,—‘ Excellence, the mantle !’ Ay, it was Excellence !” said the old man, confusedly. “Whereupon one of them threw a heap of heavy stones upon it, which made it sink to the bottom ; and when there was no longer a bubble to be seen, they were all turning away when a girl came shrieking down the narrow lane with two old women after her. But what she had to do in the matter I know not, only that the rider galloped up to her, and seized her by the hair, and held her until the old women came up. Then she swooned, and the women carried her off, while the men turned up the

other lane, which leads to San Giacomo. This is all that I saw and know about the matter, as I told the sanctity of our holy father himself; and why I should be shunned like the fiend of the plague himself—”

“But the girl—the girl!—what sort of a girl was she?—what height—complexion—shape?” exclaimed the Hospitaller, letting his oar drop in the absorption of his anxiety.

“How know I?—She was a girl like another girl—she wore petticoats,” replied the old man, gruffly. “Why do you tease me with such strange questions?—A girl!—is not one girl as like another as two poppies?”

“Noted you not even the colour of her hair, good father?—I am not asking you questions to amuse myself, but with an intent to make it worth your trouble replying,” said the knight, with forced calmness. “Was not her hair of a bright golden colour, for indeed that is much given to mischief?”

“Signor, I caught but a glance at her like an owl’s at the moon; but now you speak of hair, I think I noticed on hers a string of coins on a red ribbon, such as the foolish Jew girls of the Ghetto wear for ornament,—or else it was blood, and they had hurt her too,—for the moon shone so brightly I could but see it.”

“And yet you noted not the colour of the hair—although the horseman seized her by it too!” exclaimed the Hospitaller, impatiently.

“All cats are grey by night, and yet methinks it must have been black, for he twisted his hand in it,

and the hand looked very white against it," replied the old man musingly. "And yet I know no more than the waves I strike whether it were not green or blue! —I have known hills that were pink at a distance turn black at hand."

"But wherefore hastened you not to communicate to the governor of the city what you had seen, so quickly as to give a clue to the murderers, for I have heard the body was not found till Friday?" said the knight.

"The saints reward you! since I have earned my living on Tiber," returned the boatman with a grim smile, "I have seen dead bodies thrown in, in like manner, at least a hundred times, and never heard a word said about it, nor any imaginable trouble taken in the matter. So thinking that this would pass like the rest, I minded my own business, and let other folks' alone, until, like a fool as I was, hearing the greatness of him who was lost, I thought I should make a good day's work by carrying the news, as if I might not have remembered the saying, 'Ill-come was never Welcome!' and so ruined myself for five crowns, which was what the duke gave me,—the cardinal that was then, and said it was too much for a drunkard's dream! Could I indeed have given them any clue to the murderers I might have made my fortune, for his holiness and Lady Lucrezia were sheer mad with grief; but I had too much conscience to accuse the innocent!—'Tis hard indeed that conscience should cheat a man of his daily bread!—And yet 'twas as well as it happened, praised be Saint Bartlemy! for perhaps if they had thought I could

have betrayed them, they would have cut my throat before I could get the words well out, for who knows who was in the secret? But yonder is the Ghetto, and I trust your excellence will remember I have but so many passengers as my blessed saint sends me in defiance of my evil fortune."

"And in addition to good pay, I will give thee a good counsel, old father," said the Hospitaller, with a heavy sigh. "Do not tell your story before too many of your passengers, even strangers, lest you should not always have such honest listeners!—Nay, perchance you may meet with some who, like yon courteous attendant of mine whom we left in the waters—may have their reasons to stop your tongue at your throat."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE JEWS OF ROME.

“ But yet, I say,
If imputation and strong circumstances,
Which lead directly to the door of truth,
Will give you satisfaction, you may have it.”

SHAKESPERE.

IN Rome, as in most of the Christian cities of Europe, the Jews had (and have still in Rome !) a peculiar district appropriated to them, out of which they were not permitted to dwell. In London it was the Jewry—in Rome, the Ghetto—styled more loftily in the pontifical edicts, *Hebreorum Contubernium*. This *Contubernium* was a district of considerable extent raised originally amidst the swamps of the Tiber, at the foot of the Capitoline, surrounded either by lofty walls or houses, which were not permitted to have even a loophole to the exterior. Five massive gates, guarded by the halberdiers of the Roman magistracy, were opened at sunrise and closed at sunset, to emit and receive back the descendants of Abraham, bees laden with a spoil sweeter to them than honey—that

of the persecuting but outwitted, the insolent but cheated Christian.

Objects of unutterable contempt and hatred with the populace, in whose hearts the Catholic Church of the middle ages had infused a veneration and love for the person of the Redeemer, rather than of his attributes, approaching to a passion, and whose devotion was as yet unalloyed by the scepticism and indifference which began to pervade the higher classes of society—the regulations of the Ghetto were perhaps as beneficial to the Jews as they appeared to be severe and restrictive. Within its walls, at least, they were safe from any sudden outbreak of the fury which smouldered in the hearts of the people against the descendants of the destroyers of the Saviour; they might observe their customs and religious rites unmolested and unquestioned; and hoard the treasures which their patient industry, skill in many arts, and above all usuries, accumulated.

In the Ghetto accordingly the Jews of Rome dwelt as a nation apart—separated almost equally by their own abhorrence of the Nazarenes, and the spirit of their laws, as by the loathing of their oppressors. Many of the Jewish women were said to have never been outside the walls of the Ghetto, and to be as ignorant of the system of policy surrounding them as if the tribes still pitched their tents in the wilderness. The Hebrews themselves, with the jealousy of orientals and that inspired by their rigid law, cherished this vague ignorance in their women, while with matchless patience and pliancy they adapted their

combinations to every change in the shifting panorama of the world without.

Spread all over the earth, but preserving the fellowship of kindred wrongs and hopes, the Jews enabled one another to forestal and engross some of the most valuable trades which were exercised in the rude state of society. Above all, as usurers and dealers in precious stones, they had acquired riches which the popular envy and greed exaggerated even into the possession of magic skill in the transmutation of metals. The natural tendency of the Hebrew mind to abstruse and cabalistical lore, their intercourse with the Arabians and other eastern nations, had indeed frequently thrown some of their most subtle intellects into pursuits still darker and more fallacious. All these vague causes of hatred and fear in the minds of the people were increased by the reports in circulation relating to the mysterious customs and ceremonies of the Jewish religion. Hideous tales were repeated, and found a ready credence among the populace, against them. The immoveable constancy with which they adhered to their law, the bitter animosity with which they regarded the few proselytes gained over by the Christian church, furnished the groundwork of many of those dark legends prevalent against them; such as that they offered human sacrifices at their high festivals, generally of Christian children beguiled into their power, or of apostates from the law; the latter supposition not altogether unsupported by the fanatic hatred with which they pursued such offenders.

Thus separated from the Christian masses, or rather imprisoned, the Jews of the Ghetto preserved the characteristics of a foreign and eastern people. Notwithstanding the belief of their immense riches, or perhaps to baffle its dangerous effects, whenever the Ghetto was opened for the inspection of Christians, it presented one aspect of haggard and dilapidated poverty. This happened generally about three or four times a year, when a grand attempt at conversion was made, the pope appointing the most esteemed preachers to deliver sermons, at which the Jews were compelled to be present. All the rest of the year they were subject to unremitting fines and penalties, under which they still contrived to flourish like chickweed crushed beneath a stone. To gratify the hatred of the people, the most degrading submissions and dues were exacted from them—among the rest the annual ceremony of presenting the book of their law with an entreaty to be allowed to stay another year in Rome, either to the pontiff or the magistracy, on which it was usual to let the book fall, and to deliver the gracious reply that the pontiff permitted, but did not confirm. A foot-race of Hebrews was also a pastime which the populace were never denied in carnival time.

On the occasion to which the above dissertation is a necessary prolixity, the Jews had good reason to expect a more than usually devote throng in the train of the announcer of the Jubilee. They had prepared accordingly. On entering the gate of the Ghetto, the Hospitaller was struck with the melancholy aspect of the houses and the emptiness of the little

shops, which seemed like holes in the walls. The precious wares, the silks, the stuffs, the gold, the gems, if any such the Hebrews of the Ghetto possessed, were as carefully concealed as those they abstracted from the Egyptians on their departure into Canaan. The exceeding narrowness of the streets, which were sometimes scarcely wide enough to allow two persons to go abreast, and were generally in a manner arched by the bending over of the stories above, increased the disagreeable effect. Noisome smells greeted the nostrils at every turn, and the flutter of rags from numerous dark lattices seemed to announce the poverty within.

Not a Jew was to be seen, much less a Jewess, throughout the whole line of march to the large open space where they held their market, and where they were decreed to assemble in mass. The Christians rushed uninterruptedly on, laughing, shouting, yelling, and crushing against one another as if they were taking possession by storm. The long, narrow, and unknown windings confused and misled many, but the Hospitaller, happening to take a by-way which led directly to the scene of action, entered the market-place among the multitude which had kept pace with the Dominican and his attendants.

An open square of great extent appeared, unevenly surrounded with piles of dwellings, equally ruinous and disconsolate with those of the narrow streets behind. Most of these alleys radiated from all points into this space, and gave its disordered architecture the appearance of being split and reft into chasms.

Some of the houses seemed to be doubtfully propped with timber ; but on the summits of nearly all these tottering fabrics, the curious eye of the Hospitaller remarked, by the light of the tolerant planet which did not disdain to shed its beams as benignantly as on the domes of the Vatican, innumerable flower-pots and outlines of terraces, evincing no small skill in the oriental art of making skyey gardens on the roofs.

The piazza was paved with volcanic tufa, very unevenly laid, and in the centre was a great fountain, of granite, without the least ornament, intended exclusively for use. Around this were arranged stone benches, with tables of similarly rude material, at which usually sat the council of the elders, who decided in all disputes, regulated the market, and governed this inner empire, partly by the maxims of common sense and justice, and partly by the laws prescribed in their sacred books ; severe indeed—and severely executed—without provoking a thought of appeal to the milder and often opposing Christian judicature.

But now this Sanhedrim was installed in its place of honour for a far different purpose, to hear with inward abhorrence and outward respect that law reviled, and its complete overthrow denounced. To this intent a moveable pulpit, which resembled a bronze cauldron on a tripod, carried by four Jewish converts, was duly planted under the supreme direction of the Dominican's companion friar. The preacher himself knelt in fervent but silent prayer,

surrounded by his noble guard, most of whom were deeply in debt to the listeners, smiling with hatred and contempt, and leaning on their naked swords. Beyond the seats of the elders were assembled the great mass of those who were to profit by the exhortation, distinguished by their long beards, glittering eyes, and peculiar physiognomies, but the whole male population of the Ghetto—for not a single female was to be seen—could not certainly have been there; and in fact the Jews elected from among themselves, by lot, a certain number to make up a show, to listen to Christian verities, and to endure the insults and violence of the Christian visitors.

Beyond the circle of these compelled neophytes, a tumultuous mob struggled for the possession of every point whence a view of the proceedings could be obtained, quarrelling and fighting with one another, buffeting and pressing against the unresisting Jews, who knew that their policy was not to give the least pretext for the general massacre and plunder which on these occasions hovered over them by a finer thread than that to which hung the sword of Damocles. They submitted without expostulation to the rude swaying of the mob; to their blows and revilings opposing only an endurance which could not be exhausted. But the horror, anxiety, and rage which glowed in their bosoms were strongly reflected in their visages as seen by the smoky glare of innumerable torches which they were compelled to exhibit at all the windows of their houses. Engaged in this office only did some women appear—for the most

part withered and old—or veiled with more than Turkish scrupulosity.

A remarkable exception to this seeming rule struck Alfonso, when having ensconced himself out of observation up a dark doorway which belonged to a house falling in ruins and uninhabited, he had leisure to survey the whole pandemonium. Not far to his left projected an irregular pile of woodwork, built not without some pretensions to architecture, with quaint carvings and devices of beasts and birds on the joists and window-frames, but all toppling down in extreme neglect and decay. About mid height jutted a pent-house with a narrow balcony, supported like many of the other buildings by props of timber set against it from the ground. The lower part of the house was closed and barred, but from the mortar hanging over the door with a pestle chained to it, the knight concluded that it was the residence of some apothecary or other professor of the healing art.

In the balcony of this tumbling tenement was the object which attracted the Hospitaller's attention, always, in spite of his severe principles, alive to the perception of female beauty; yet it was not this quality alone which fixed his notice, although the face and form might have been taken for a perfect model of oriental beauty, but for the pallid hue which sicklied the golden cast of the complexion, the drooping and meagre lines of the figure, else so finely moulded. The Jewess was attired in a dusty and disordered garb, which yet was originally of fine silks, but so curiously pranked out and bedizened with ribands, shreds of different colours, and what seemed to be gems of the

purest water, that the knight at first imagined she was some unhappy creature put forth to attract licentious observation. Her countenance, young, wasted, and pallid, strengthened the impression, but a farther consideration at least staggered it. Shading the torch with her hand, its light struck powerfully on her face; and in the wild, vacant depth of the eyes, the unmeaning smile with which she watched the rolling of the human sea below, the fantastic richness of her garniture, exceeding in glare and contrast every vagary even of a Jewish toilet, Alfonso imagined that he recognised characteristics of insanity. But perhaps it was one of these ornaments—a chain of coins twisted in the black disordered hair—which chiefly attracted the Hospitaller's continued observation. And yet he could not remember for some time why he noticed it at all.

Meanwhile the preparations for the Dominican's harangue went on. The pulpit was duly hoisted, and as the friar had now concluded his prayer, two rabbins advanced to present him with a copy of the Old Testament used in the synagogue, for from their own law were they to be confuted. They offered it with a deep oriental bend, and a humble request that the messenger of his holiness, their sovereign, would be pleased to deliver his message. The Dominican replied briefly and sternly that it was not the message of any earthly power which he was there to deliver, and then mounted the pulpit by a ladder, which his humble brother held for him with infinite reverence. The attendant friar then sprinkled a lustration all around the pulpit with a bunch of hyssop, which he

dipped in an urn of holy water, liberally showering on the elders, while they gnawed their under lips in silent wrath and contempt.

Interested as the Hospitaller felt himself in the singular appearance of the Jewish girl, it was with no satisfaction that he found his curiosity shared by a personage who took his post immediately before the doorway in which the knight had ensconced himself out of observation. He wore a large hat, slouched over his face, with a twist of cockleshells round it, the grey mantle and staff of a pilgrim of Compostella, so that little of his features was visible, save his very brilliant eyes. These he kept fixed so long and earnestly on the Hebrew girl in her balcony, that Alfonso's uneasiness was certainly not unjustified, since he began to take an interest in her welfare, and the eyes were filled with something of mingled gloom and scrutiny.

"Ay, it is she—but how changed!" muttered the gazer half aloud. "Where is this rogue?—he keeps us waiting long."

This the Hospitaller now perceived was addressed to a man who stood at some little distance, who, by his coarse armour and accoutrements, especially the morion unhonoured by any cognizance, was probably a rider in one of the numerous free companies.

"Yea, my lord, it is mad Miriam!" returned the rider, in an under tone.

"The wench who they say had a Christian lover roasted alive by the Jews?" said the pilgrim, ironically. "It is indeed—physician, cure thyself!—since the skilful hags, her grandames, cannot restore the blood

to that corpse-like cheek, nor take the wild-fire out of her eyes. But surely this boasted steel-hearted knave of thine means to play us false?"

"Were it against the fiend, I would warrant him; but folks have a great reverence for this holy man, that goes to visit a plague-patient more cheerful than another his dame," replied the rider. "But if it is necessary he should die, methinks it might be much more wisely adventured in the lonely places he haunts, than here in the midst of thousands."

"Here only can a tumult be raised without much danger, and easily limited. I do not set forests on fire to make me warm," replied the pilgrim. "Here they will lay the mischief on the Jews; elsewhere suspicion might—nay, must—be roused; for what bravo would deem it worth his while to slay a wretched monk?"

"Yonder he comes, and, by all my sins! streaming like a water-dog!—Waggle your staff, signor,—but he sees us," said the soldier, in whom and in his fellow interlocutor a vague suspicion entered the mind of the involuntary hearer that he beheld the Duke of Romagna, and his satellite, Migueloto. But he had scarcely time to devise any tangible meaning to the strange words he overheard, when a third person joined the pilgrim and his friend. It was not without some emotion that he recognised in the sullen, drenched ruffian who approached, his late unlucky companion, the peasant of the Marshes.

"Giovan, Giovan! how long thou hast kept me gaping for thee!" muttered the pilgrim, clutching the

bravo's arm impatiently. "But how camest thou in this plight?"

At this moment the voice of the preacher was heard over all the murmuring and confused noises in the piazza, reading a Hebrew text, which he afterwards translated into Latin. It was the striking of the rock by Moses, when the waters gushed forth at Horeb. The mingling of those powerful tones hindered Alfonso from distinctly hearing the account which the bravo gave of his immersion. But towards the conclusion the pilgrim drew him farther back into the ruined gateway, and the Hospitaller heard him ejaculate between his clenched teeth—"Dog of a villain! dost thou dare to say that thou wilt fail me then? Hast thou forgotten who I am?"

"But, signor, methinks it was an angel sent to my prevention, in the armour of a Knight of the Sepulchre!" said the bravo, shuddering with fear and the cold of his wet clothing.

"Idiot! dost thou deem that an angel could have touched thee, and not blasted thee?" returned the pilgrim, impatiently. "But if Giorgio Schiavone babbles thus—it is well for the old fool that he pretends not to have seen faces but masks! But what hath this stranger—a Knight of St. John, thou sayest—to do to stir up the muddy waters? An angel!—by Heaven, I will make a devil of thee if thou dost hesitate! What more wouldst thou have? Name thine own reward."

"A pyramid of gold shall not bribe me to it, signor!" replied the bravo. "But I am a true man,

and will keep no hire which I have not earned ; so come, Don Miguel, when it pleases you, to the catacombs, and I will restore all that I have received of my lord's gold. But the saints protect that holy man—else wherefore should the armed figure deprive me of my stiletto, and leave me my life to repent in ?”

“ Holy man !—he !—honest Giovanni—holy !—ay, according to his country's proverb—*La cruz en los pechos, el diablo en los hechos !*” returned the pilgrim, with stifled vehemence. “ Yes, yes !—the cross on the breast, the devil in the rest !—I tell thee, friend—was it a saint's part to stir a wife to mortal hatred of her husband,—to scorn, to loathe, to divorce him !—for it was he that stirred the fire in her soul against the Lord of Pesaro, and will prevent her from this so necessary marriage with the Orsino ! Thou superstitious slave ! canst thou not guess a reason for it ? See we not all, that he watches over her like a dragon over a mine of diamonds ?”

It may be imagined with what painful curiosity the Hospitaller listened to this effusion, apparently of jealousy, although the lady's name, its object, had not once been pronounced ; but he no longer doubted that the pilgrim was Cæsar Borgia.

“ I know nothing of any dragons nor hidden treasures, my lord,” said the bravo, with dogged stubbornness. “ Albeit, I have paid many a bright ducat (which will never come back to me) to Mother Notte for divining rods, and such like trumperies. But may my soul never see Paradise, if I lift steel against that blessed man !”

"Fool, idiot, beast!" said the pilgrim, gnashing his teeth like a baffled tiger. "Why, when this traitorous monk's destruction will set the mob in such roaring mutiny as will give thy people (whom I see swarming about) a chance to commence a work which will enrichen ye all for ever!"

"For ever!" repeated the bravo, somewhat hesitatingly. "But 'tis impossible! See you not how he is surrounded by naked swords? I thought he would have come darkling through the narrow streets. Moreover, I have taken an oath—you heard it, signor?—at least, a man would not willingly damn himself."

"Thou swore'st, Giovanni, not to lift steel against him!" said the pilgrim, eagerly. "But have I not seen thee bring down an eagle's flight soaring almost out of sight, with thine arquebuss? Where is it?—thou wert wont to carry it slung on thy shoulders."

"I sold it to the Leghorn rogues to take to England, where the gentlemen love such distant fowling. For my part I prefer to steal on my game with a club or a dagger," replied the bravo.

"Tut!—but wait; methinks I can yet provide thee with a weapon—I have marked for some time how yonder man-at-arms keeps gaping at the Jewess," said the pilgrim, emerging and signing to the bravo and Migueloto to retreat into the doorway. This movement brought the twain much nearer to Don Alfonso, but luckily without coming into contact with him, for valiant and powerful as was the Knight of St. John, it may be conjectured that he had no desire to

expose himself to a conflict in the dark with three such opponents.

The person whom Cæsar indicated had indeed been for some time engaged in surveying the young Hebrew girl, and in vainly soliciting her attention with gestures and smiles. He was of middling height, but very stout and burly in frame, round of jaws and square of forehead, with a fierce and audacious expression of countenance, not unmingled with a kind of brutal good humour and joviality. His armour and accoutrements were those of a German trooper.

"By the mass, signor! I see your eyes are caught too," said the pilgrim, courteously saluting the man-at-arms. "Saw you ever a prettier piece of heathen flesh and blood?"

"And yet she looks more like a waxen image than a woman of the stuff you mention, sir pilgrim," returned the trooper, in an Italian which partook in no manner of a foreign accent.

"She is poisoned by the vapours of the drugs, and minerals, and alchemy amidst which she lives, and it were a charity to take her out of it," replied the pilgrim.

"I would the Ghetto were put to plunder, and take the Jewish gold who might, I would have yonder Jewish girl for my share," replied the trooper; adding in a melancholy tone, "but I am under severe penances now, by injunction of yonder bitter Penitentiary."

"Thou must have wrought some special deed to need his aid, brother," returned the pilgrim.

"But for wronging an old man of some few evil

days of pains and aches," said the trooper, carelessly. "But since we are at questioning, what hast thou done to travel so far with the cockleshells?"

"I killed my brother, they say," replied the pilgrim, with equal coolness.

"Mine was but mine uncle!" said the trooper, eagerly, as if rejoicing in the comparative inferiority of his crime. "'Tis true he had pampered me when a child, but who can wait for ever for an inheritance?"

"Ay!—old men never die," returned the pilgrim, gloomily. "Thou art a bold fellow, doubtless, and a soldier too. I have been a good part of my time a silly priest, yet will I wager that I dare do what thou art now only daring to think."

"What am I thinking, I pray ye, then?" replied the trooper, with evident surprise.

"Thou art marking how conveniently those timbers are set to the balcony of the Jewess, for a man to climb up, and thinking that thou wouldst be glad if thou couldst summon the courage to scale it, and give her a kiss, to the scorn of this infidel mob," said the pilgrim.

"Yea, 'tis said they can better bear to have their beards spat on, than their women smiled on—and thou hast fairly guessed," replied the soldier, with increased surprise. "But for the fear of it!—I have clambered the wall of a strong city with my dagger's aid only, when boiling lead poured over among us like melting snow, and Vitellozzo himself kept his foot from the ladder."

“My staff against thine arquebuss, thou darest not attempt it, and I will succeed in it,” returned the pilgrim.

“By our Lady!—but the Penitentiary bound me only to do offence to the pagans, and to use my arms against no man but by his command,” said the soldier.

“What man dost thou rave about, or what arms,—to snatch a kiss from a Jew girl’s brown cheek?” replied the pilgrim. “And are not the Jews pagan enough? Then, by Santiago, if thou wilt hold my staff, which is hollow and full of the gold of my expenses, I will do it before thine eyes, and for the very honour of the faith to put so bold a scorn upon these crucifiers!”

“Nay, but thou shalt not—at least till I have failed,” said the trooper, angrily. “Hold thou mine arquebuss and morion while I climb; but for I know that this town is full of rogues, if thou meanest me any deceit, learn better than to practise it, for I am not what I seem, but a great lord who will as soon crack a skull as an egg.”

The pilgrim replied apparently with some warmth, but as the preacher’s tones swelled suddenly high, only his latter words were audible, in which he declared that he would remain near the ruin, to restore the arquebuss, or rouse the populace to a rescue in case it became necessary. And with this compact, Alfonso marked that the trooper gave his weapon, helmet, and some heavy pieces of armour to the care of the pilgrim, and glided away as if to fulfil his insolent and violent project.

The pilgrim retired almost instantly, and rejoined his two accomplices, who were eagerly listening in their concealment of the doorway.

"Here, then, is thy weapon, Gian, if thou wouldst not rather have the lead in thine own skull!" he said, handing the piece to the bravo, who received it with manifest reluctance. "Moreover, I have made thee a pretty diversion—when the tumult which this villain will raise begins, what hast thou to do but to fire! And dost thou fear for thy person and soul when so black a wretch—for I know the thickskull to be Oliverotto da Fermo, that murdered his good old uncle by treachery—hazards both for a fool's frolic? The monk is a fair mark!—do but look at him perched in his pulpit yonder with his arms spread out as if to open his breast to thy aim!"

"He looks like a black crucifixion!" muttered the bravo. "Some stray eyes will be sure to note the light of the burning tow,—and if I escape not, the Jews will scarce be questioned."

"Tush!—thou canst easily retreat into these ruins—and the uproar which Miguel and I will raise at different extremities of the crowd will distract all attention," returned the Borgia, and the bravo seemed at length to yield to the force of argument. He examined the lock of the arquebuss, pronounced it excellent, and finally, although with some lingering hesitation, declared his readiness to undertake the task. It was agreed that he should take the opportunity of the confusion which would be sure to follow the Lord of Fermo's attack, to fire at the monk; after which it was certain that a tumult would arise to fa-

cilitate his escape. * Meanwhile the duke and his myrmidon were to separate to opposite ends of the crowd, to misdirect the populace with their shouts. Upon this notable project they separated almost immediately, for Oliverotto was certain to put no delay in the execution of so congenial an action, as that into which he had been cajoled.

But while the conspirators rapidly settled the details of the plan, their unseen auditor was as rapidly revolving in his mind the possible means of foiling it. To rush forth, and proclaim the intended treachery would, perhaps, in most other countries, ages, and places have been sufficient to counteract it, and bring punishment on the planners. But in this case it was more likely to secure their triumph. It was far from improbable that the projectors, finding their murderous intentions detected, would fall upon the detector unitedly, and perhaps assassinate him ere he had time to reveal their treachery. In the rancorous and mutually suspicious irritation of men's minds, the least spark might kindle an universal blaze. The fears and hatred of both parties would probably interpret the first flash of steel into a signal of preconcerted massacre or attack; and the consequences sought to be averted would inevitably follow.

The sagacious intellect of Alfonso suggested these dangers and their remedies almost simultaneously. He patiently awaited the separation of the colleagues on their enterprise, and meanwhile, under this new and appalling light, Alfonso glanced towards the Dominican with a change of every feeling which he had hitherto experienced towards him. He was now

in the height of his discourse, and for the first time the Hospitaller noticed that he was preaching in Hebrew. Whether this was merely to display his profound erudition, or to captivate the inhabitants of the Ghetto by so unusual a condescension, it is certain that in Hebrew he was discoursing—and Hebrew which seemed now to excite a real and profound attention in the Jewish audience. It seemed to the Hospitaller, from the names he distinguished, that Fra Bruno was arraying the evidence of the prophecies in battering-rams—the usual course in convincing the unconvincibles of fifteen hundred years. And yet his discourse moved both himself and his audience more than the mere utterance of rabbinical glosses was likely to do. In his jealous hallucination—if such for the moment it was—Alfonso thought that the monk was much younger than he at first conjectured him to be—that the austerity and gloom of his countenance only displayed more brilliantly the irradiations of mind which illuminated it, and that his worn and gaunt figure had in it something of supernatural dignity and grandeur. He remembered the gaze with which the confessor had followed the retiring figure of his beauteous penitent; and the influence which his eloquence was likely to exercise on women was evinced in the wild and breathless attention with which the Jewish girl gazed and listened. But there was no time for reflection on the subject, for John of the Catacombs now turned his back to the crowd, knelt, and with great caution began striking a flint to kindle his matchrope.

With equal heedfulness, to avoid betraying his whereabouts, the Knight of St. John unsheathed his massive sword, and awaited the result of the worthy's labours. But the slight jar of the metal with the sheath startled the bravo's sense. He paused for an instant, and then muttering "a rat!" resumed his operation. A spark soon fell upon the tow, but as if not quite well assured as to the cause of the sound he had heard, he blew the matchrope into a glow which lighted up—not only the ruin—but the towering person of the Knight of St. John, leaning on his bare and glittering brand! With a yell as if he had seen a wild beast couched to spring at him, the bravo sprung up—and was instantly struck down with a mighty blow of the Hospitaller's gauntleted hand. He lay senseless and covered with blood on the ground; and, setting his foot on the ruffian's breast, for an instant Alfonso hesitated whether to strike the blade into it, or spare him to make a full revelation of his coadjutors' persons and purposes. The steel hung wavering over the prostrate bravo when the shrieks of a woman, and tumultuous outcries in the piazza, announced that Oliverotto had succeeded better in his part of the plan. There was no longer time for deliberation, and trampling with his crushing weight over the bravo's breast, Don Alfonso rushed forth in the piazza, shouting in a voice which would have been distinctly audible amidst the roar of a battle—"Christians and Jews! stir not—Christians, I am a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre;—Jews, I will rebuke this licentious brawler!" And forcing his way through the increasing confusion, a sudden

hush of fear and doubt silenced the mingled mass when his powerful form was seen clambering up to the balcony, where Oliverotto held the shrieking Jewess struggling in his arms.

“Come, come, my pretty decoy-dove ! what means this ? I want but a little wasp of a kiss or so out of those dragon-flower lips !” said the baron, clutching the Jewish girl in spite of her struggles and continued shrieks, disregarding in his brutal eagerness all that passed below. But suddenly his shoulder was grasped as if in the teeth of a lion, and so painful was the pressure that the arm was benumbed and dropped powerlessly to his side ; and before he could make a single effort at resistance, the powerful Hospitaller seized and hurled him over from the balcony, amidst a thunder of applause mingled with howls of derision and rage.

The populace immediately below, being the outskirts of the centre of conversion, were principally composed of Christians, and the rabble of the pilgrims. An insult to a Jewess was not likely to rouse their indignation against the perpetrator, though the prompt retribution excited merriment, and admiration of the chivalrous inflicter, but they offered no obstacles, when Oliverotto, who was but little hurt by his fall, turned ragingly round, and challenged his assailant to descend and meet him in mortal conflict. But the Dominican, perceiving the tumult and its cause, shouted to the people to secure the brawler, in the name of God and of the church. The mob obeyed, although with doubt and reluctance, and closed their ranks to obstruct the way. But Oliverotto, who

had sovereign reasons to dread finding himself in the custody of the church, being Vitellozzo's beloved pupil and lieutenant, gave up his contest with the Hospitaller, and took to flight. Overthrowing the first who met him, and the rest offering no very sturdy resistance, he forced his way to one of the narrow passages of the Ghetto, and fled through it. Fra Bruno was not, however, to be so easily baffled; he had already leaped from his pulpit, and waving a silver cross in the air, he led the way in tumultuous pursuit, with a general rush of the nobles, pilgrims, Jews, and populace.

END OF VOL. I.

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